

CELEBRATING IN CHAOS:  
INTRODUCING A NEW MEANING OF DEATH,  
DYING AND MOURNING IN THE PACIFIC-TONGAN CONTEXT

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

by  
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## ABSTRACT

### CELEBRATING IN CHAOS: INTRODUCING A NEW MEANING OF DEATH, DYING AND MOURNING IN THE PACIFIC-TONGAN CONTEXT

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When people are in mourning, the church's enrichment program can be a place where healing and wholeness occur. The purpose of this study is to look at current approaches towards the bereaved in the Methodist Church in Tonga and to introduce new meaning and recovery through celebrating Christ's victory over death.

A questionnaire was used as the primary research tool; information collected from the Kava circle was the second tool for this study. The core of the questionnaire was to inquire regarding the current ministry of the church with bereaved family members and other mourners during the period of taboo. People were also asked how the church could be faithful to its calling and provide a holistic ministry to its members.

The conclusion drawn from the research is that the current ministry of the Methodist Church in Tonga fails to minister to the whole person's needs in the time of mourning. Rather it confines its ministry to the spiritual needs of people.

A new program is proposed, emphasizing the church's ministry towards the bereaved. The enrichment program offers possibilities for a celebrative ministry to help the bereaved accept and recognize the grief process as part of God's grace.

Chapter 1 provides the groundwork for the research project. Chapter 2 is a summary of general findings demonstrating how the traditional death rituals were based on three Tongan elements: traditional beliefs, love and respect, and obligation. Chapter 3 provides a brief history of the ancient Tongan society and the Tongan society after the influence of the Christian missionaries. Chapter 4 shares theological beliefs regarding grief and loss from Biblical times as well as traditional and current beliefs. This is followed by a proposed new theology of death and grief. Chapter 5 provides the data and summary of questionnaire responses and an enrichment program as a model for the church's ministry. Chapter 6 is a summary of findings, culminating in a personal reflection on the topic.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Beginning with missionization in the nineteenth century, Tongans were forced to participate in a constant struggle to define their existence in terms of the Christian religion as transmitted to them by foreigners. The Tongan society was torn from family, political, economic, cultural and religious beliefs. The new religion among the indigenous people was, in essence, very different from that of their ancestors. The modern Tongan society found in the Christian religion some approaches to self-expression that were acceptable in their culture. Both the literature and my own impression suggest that Christianity in Tonga is now functioning under an over-lapping system of traditional culture and Christian beliefs. A certain amount of syncretism is in evidence in the melding of Christianity with various elements of traditional culture and indigenous religion.

Many examples of simultaneous assimilation can be cited, which have reshaped both Christianity and traditional culture. Within the Methodist church in Tonga, for example, the secular monarchy is not just a figurehead, but has power in decision making. The church has hesitated to get involved in political affairs because of its status as the unofficial state church, but often the church ministry and the secular leaders become entangled and confused in the politics of power. For instance,

the Tongan constitution was not only written by the missionaries, but also has a religious base.

A translation of these laws (Society Island), was prepared by the missionaries, and placed in the hands of the king and chiefs, for their united consideration. Many consultations were held with chiefs, and various alterations, amendments, and additions were made.<sup>1</sup>

Here we find an overlapping system in which Christianity has great impact on the society and where traditional social patterns influence Christianity. One major instance of the overlap is seen in education because the churches now hold major responsibility for education in Tonga. The churches have educated more than three-quarters of the whole population, while the Government is held accountable for the rest. As a result, education in Tonga suffers from heavy indoctrination by the church. The influence of the church in the school system contributes to the confusion between church and State, and limit students' preparation for the real world.

The Methodist church in Tonga is now embarking on the process of transforming its mission in order to address the interests of Christianity in the Tongan society. In light of this discussion, one of the areas that the Methodist church in Tonga needs to reexamine is the theology and practice related to death and mourning. The Methodist church in Tonga can no longer rely on

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<sup>1</sup> [Rev.] Thomas West, Ten Years in South Central Polynesia: Personal Mission to the Friendly Islands and Their Dependencies (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1865), 212.



missionary theology to provide the meaning of death, dying, grief and mourning. The church must reform the present ritual of death into a more celebrative ritual, influenced by the contemporary Christian liturgical renewal movement.

### The Statement of the Problem

During the period of death, mourning and grief (a period of taboo for Tongans), the Tongan people need to modify their experience from one focused on loss to one focused on grace. They specially need to reflect on the life of the deceased and on the possibilities for their own healing, hope, and recovery. The Methodist Church of Tonga provides an insufficient response to the urgent needs of people who are bereaved. Particular questions that must be explored in order to understand this problem are as follows.

1. What is the significant difference between the Tongan and Western meanings of death?

2. Is there a need for the Tongan church to transform the traditional-Christian ritual in order to give new meaning to the death process?

3. How would a transformed Christian ritual reaffirm the value of the Tongan culture?

4. How would a transformed Christian teaching of death provide a potential for Christian growth and development in Tonga?

### Importance of the Problem

Tongan culture has traditionally accepted death as a problem, focusing more on the grief elements of death than on celebrating a person's life. The ritual of death mainly contributes to the development of depression, manifested in negative feelings, attitudes, and actions in Tongan life. The daily regimen is halted, and normal obligations are ignored, often with negative consequences. For more than a century, the church's most important ministry has been thought to be nurturing the soul. It was not until recently that secular matters affiliated with death, such as family needs and work responsibilities, have finally received enough attention to engage the church and society in seeking solutions to the problem. The manner in which the Tongan community emphasizes the present more than the future has accelerated the conflict with Christian teachings of life and resurrection.

Historically, the Christian church has been the major social and intellectual force within the Tongan society. The influence of Christian thought on this particular culture has not only shaped its present but will continue to have great impact on its future. The significance of this particular problem appears because the practice of Christianity (*lotu fakakalisitiane*) has taken on many unproductive mourning rituals from the past, such as lengthy *tapu* (*taboos*) and has not subdued the more problematic elements of traditional belief regarding life and death for the

contemporary context. There are some traditional customs and beliefs that are essential to the life of the Tongan people which need to be maintained; others are disposable. (Certain pre-Christian elements of death regarding burial, lengthy mourning period, and grieving are among the customs that have been incorporated or transformed into Christian teaching.) The Tongan Christianity that has resulted from the missionization of the nineteenth century is not exactly what the missionaries had in mind, but neither is it a simple extension of the traditional religion. Rather it is a religion surrounded by a unique and strong culture. The Tongan church obviously became very loyal to the traditional teaching, or what I call the "missionary theology" of the missionaries, which determined to a large extent the way the church has carried out its ministry for the last hundred years.

The dying process within the Tongan culture brings out the most conservative elements of the culture and is the occasion for the most important societal gatherings. In the rituals surrounding death, one can see how the various elements of Tongan society fit together; here, much of the enculturation of the young takes place. During the process, the involvement of *lotu* (Christianity) is quite essential. Therefore, a study of this particular issue is critically important for the church and its mission in the new millennium. The impact of radical social changes within Tongan society today forces the church to develop

a meaningful theological understanding and mission; this can help the church reconstruct its ministry, both theoretically and practically. The theology and mission need to be more relevant to the daily life of the people. This study will demonstrate the urgency for the Tongan church to develop a viable theology with respect to the culture and provide a holistic view of life and a new sense of meaning during the grief period.

In Tonga, where people are born and die in their homes, dying is part of "everyday" reality. Death becomes less of an end to life than a stage in a process. Tongans wish to die in old age, relieved of pain, surrounded by friends and family, attended by sensitive caregivers, reconciled with all persons, in justice with humanity and the world, at peace with God.<sup>2</sup> However, the attitudes towards death are altered within a context that is shaped by the realities of contemporary political, economic and social change. The economics and constraints of the death rituals have negative affects on the community in the economic, social, and spiritual realms.

A careful study of the mission of the church shows that the Tongan Church has failed to offer a more positive response to the grief process and has blindly adopted the so-called "Tongan way", which in today's Christian context negates the Christian teachings of life and death. The nineteenth century missionaries

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<sup>2</sup> This is a common understanding of death by both the lay people and the clergy who tried to define what death was for them.

introduced Tongans to a theology that was more interested in the salvation of the soul and life after death than in the present. This dualistic mentality has become an important element of Tongan rationale. For the most part, the present response to the grief process encourages the members of the community to neglect their normal responsibilities. The church has not successfully transformed these traditional customs of grief to a more fully Christian understanding of life and resurrection.

Both the Tongan community overseas and the society in Tonga have undergone tremendous social, political, and spiritual changes due to internal and external causes. The impact of these changes is reflected in such factors as high unemployment, school absences, overpopulation, lack of natural resources, and general corruption within the church and government. Within the church complex, the church is experiencing many changes, both in its structures and policies. The church has failed to introduce new strategies to deal positively with death and give new meaning where the grief can be transformed into an enriching and empowering process. The limited scope of the church's ministry in only focusing on loss has partially contributed to the decline of the Methodist church in Tonga. The problem reveals the church's failure to minister to the whole person and to respond to the Gospel within the human context. A challenge is needed to offer solace and empowerment in the Pacific-Tongan culture. The church

must become the main agent encouraging culture changes to bring more healing, grace, power, and meaning to the people.

### Statement of the Thesis

A new theology of death and resurrection will necessitate new models for Tongan church ministry, transforming that which has been inherited from blending Christian missionary theology and earlier Tongan culture into a ministry of celebration in the present, grounded in hope for the future. Resources for this transformation can be found within Christian tradition and Tongan culture, but a rediscovery and reinterpretation is needed.

The current Tongan Christian theology and rituals of death and bereavement need to be modified, transforming the dominant theology of death and chaos into a theology of death and resurrection and transforming a ritual of bereavement into a ritual of mourning combined with thanksgiving.

### Implication of the Thesis

Culture often serves as a barrier to the unfolding of the whole mystery of the Gospel. The church must attempt to change the existing view, which emphasizes loyalty to the culture and customs of the community. This, to a large extent, has influenced the way the church has carried out its mission. As a result, the church often fails to function as a positive witness in the context of a community in need of transformation. The Tongan

church, controlled by missionary theology, generally remains weak and ineffective, unwilling to challenge and question the overarching problems of the society and culture. Some traditional elements of Tongan cultures such as familial closeness and support on the other hand can be utilized to vitalize, enrich and strengthen the present mission of the church in times of mourning. Herein lies the hope for a ministry that will prove viable, relevant and practical within the wider process of death.

The teaching of the church has influenced the Tongan people to believe that serving the institution (church) and the culture is a higher commitment to God than serving one's own needs. But the new challenge is to define the essence of the Gospel message within the church-oriented Tongan society in order to heighten the self-esteem of the individual before God and society.

#### Definitions of Major Terms

Taboo (tapu): Taboo is a period of mourning in the Tongan culture out of respect to the deceased. The length of the mourning is different for the King, nobles, and commoners. A common concept of taboo is exercised among other Pacific people, prohibiting certain activities that might offend the supernatural.

Tongan Church: This refers to all Christian churches in Tonga; however, the Free Wesleyan (Methodist) church of Tonga is the primary object of the reference.

Celebration: Celebration is the culmination of religious experiences. Celebration in the time of death is a moment created for people to experience Divine love and transform their attitude of grief to include a focus on Christ's victory over death and his abiding presence with believers during the time of transition.

Tongan Context: This refers to the general condition of life within the Tongan community, especially the socio-cultural, economic, and religious contexts. It also includes indigenous cultural historical realities such as customs, traditions, beliefs and legends.

Culture: Within this project, we can understand culture as the central medium through which people give meaning to, and shape, their realities, both consciously and unconsciously. This concept refers to the process by which people construct mutual understanding and consensus, a necessary precondition for the function of society. Culture is a dynamic concept which refers to intra and inter-group processes of experience.

Tongan Way: For the purpose of this paper, "Tongan Way" refers to a certain element of the culture, which accommodates change without losing character. The country has experienced radical changes in its history; yet it has held to certain norms and elements of its unique culture.

Death: Death is not an enemy to be conquered or a prison to be escaped; it is an integral part of our lives that gives



meaning to human existence. It sets a limit on our time in this life, urging us to do something productive with that time as long as it is ours to use.<sup>3</sup>

Grief: Grief is an emotional suffering caused by death or loss. Alan Wolfelt explains that grief involves a sequence of thoughts and feelings that follow the loss and accompany mourning. Grief is a process, and as a result, it is not a specific emotion like fear or sadness, but is a constellation of various thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Grief is the internal meaning given to the external events.<sup>4</sup>

Kava Circle: The Kava circle, called "*faikava*/'*ilokava*," is understood as follows: (1) It consists primarily of men who sit around the kava bowl exchanging ideas, thoughts, dreams, and stories. (2) It is a time of sharing the pains, concerns, frustrations and needs of the participants. (3) It can be a special occasion or a regular time of gathering where men usually come together for fellowship and to celebrate an accomplishment, (4) The Kava circle is a fellowship where people of various ages and ranks have a group discussion. Kava is the Tongan national drink made by adding water to the macerated root of the pepper tree.

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, J. ed, Death: The Final Stage of Growth (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1975), vii.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Wolfelt, Death and Grief: A Guide for Clergy (Muncie, Ind: Accelerate Development., 1988), 1.

Fakaloto fale'ia (enrichment program): The meaning of the term "enrichment" is meaningful to Tongans despite the newness of the approach. My concept of enrichment can be understood by at least two Tongan terms. First, in the classic Tongan word *FAKALOTO*, it applies to the heart, the most valuable element of our identity. The other term referred to is *fale'ia*. It means a meeting place where people are interconnected. During the period of taboo, an enrichment program would address mourners' hearts and bring them to grow mentally and spiritually.

#### Previous Work in the Field

Not until the late 1960s did Christian literature become regularly available in the Pacific-Tongan context. Even now, few published materials are written on the Gospel and Pacific Tongan culture or related issues. Hence, I have found little written work on Tongan bereavement and grief practices in particular.

The works of a few Tongan historians are useful tools for this project. Materials that provide information on the early history of Tongan society, like those by Sione Latukefu, John Martin and E. E. V Collocott are valuable here. The anthropological work of Barbara Burns is extremely important because she touches on the issues of grief and bereavement.

My personal experience of the Tongan rituals and activities of grief and mourning and the impact of Christian teaching and beliefs on life and death experiences is also a source. Another

important source for this study derives from discussions with both clergy and members of local congregations.

Pacific-Tongan churches are seeking a renewal or reform of their mission approaches, both within the church and within their communities. The purpose is to bring new meaning to death, drawing from both Christian faith traditions and Tongan culture. It offers a new approach of hope during a time of transition and grief.

### Limitations

The purview of this project is limited to the theology and rituals surrounding death, grief and bereavement in Tongan and Tongan American contexts. First, it presents an assessment of the church's historical transitions and their effects on the present rituals surrounding death in Tonga. Secondly, the project will suggest a new theology and develop an enrichment program based on this new theology.

A study of grief and mourning in the life of Tongan villagers ultimately raises questions about the role of the church and the role of the pastor to the bereaved families. This project, through a study of available sources and an exploratory empirical study, attempts to create a mutual understanding and respect between church and state, and between Christianity and the culture. It offers a new dimension of ministry, a ministry which focuses on the celebration of life during times of

transition and grief, and a new approach to encourage hope, with positive strategies for action.

### Methodology

The method of this project was to review the limited relevant literature on the subject and to analyze the results from two different questionnaires. One questionnaire was designed for the clergy, both in Tonga and the United States. Another questionnaire was distributed to Methodist laity of the village of *Mu'a* (the former capital of Tonga). All questionnaires were distributed at random. The main focus of the questionnaire was to find out how the Tongan church could help to improve its understanding of death.

Another important method of this research was an open discussion in the *Kava* circle. The advantage of this particular gathering was that people of various generations and denominations participated. The *Kava* circle discussion focused on these questions: (1) What is the true meaning of the church's existence? (2) How should the church carry out its ministry to mourners? (3) Is the church's present program towards the bereaved sufficient? (4) How could the church in the United States be different in providing ministry to the bereaved through a focus on celebration? In the *Kava* circle, I also shared some of the issues raised in the questionnaire, such as the needs of the family, to get elaboration and response from the men.

Drawing from the insights of this study, I have designed an enrichment program for the grieving and bereaved to be utilized by ministers during the *fakaloto fale'ia* as an instrument for a practical and meaningful ministry.

### Outlines

Chapter 2 discusses the traditional rituals of funerals and bereavement in the Tongan community. This will include the rituals of both pre-Christian and Christian eras.

Chapter 3 examines the rapid social changes that are now shaping traditional Tongan customs and their impact on the church's teachings on death and bereavement.

Chapter 4 shares the theological aspects of the grief process and proposes a new theology to transform the old.

Chapter 5 introduces new strategies for the enrichment of families in times of loss. I will present an enrichment program for the grieving and bereaved to be used by ministers as tools for a practical and meaningful ministry.

Finally, the last chapter not only concludes this study with a summary of its findings, but points towards using it as a tool for future work in redesigning the ministry surrounding grief.

## CHAPTER 2

### Funeral/Grief: In the Tongan Context

#### Introduction

This chapter serves two main purposes. First, it describes the pre-Christian beliefs and notions, which shaped the funeral rituals and grief process in early Tongan traditional society. Second, it articulates the context in which the Christian teaching of death and resurrection has influenced Tongan society today. The discussion will be limited to the historical development of bereavement and its role within the context of Tongan society.

Religious beliefs have always been an important matter for everyone in Tongan society from king to slave. Religious dictates in the Tongan society reach down to every aspect of life: to the individual, family, and community. The Tongan culture is rooted in various religious beliefs, and understanding these beliefs helps one understand the spectrum of grief in Tongan communities. The most universal and visible elements of the culture are: Tongan religious beliefs, the expression of love and respect, and the commoner's obligation to the chief or to one with higher rank, through rituals and unwritten norms. In this study, I will articulate how these aspects became fundamental to Tongan behavior during the funeral rituals and grief process. I will then focus on the interplay between Christian missionary teachings and traditional practices.

### Pre-Christian Religious Influence

This section will explore the traditional beliefs of pre-Christian era.

#### Beliefs

The ancient religion of the Tongan people rests chiefly upon the following beliefs: (1) There are 'Otua (gods) who are superior to all that is human, who are able to control human actions, and who discover all the most secret thoughts of humans. (2) There are other 'Otua (gods), namely the souls of all deceased nobles and talking chiefs, who have similar power to dispense good and evil, but in a lesser degree. (3) The world was of doubtful origin, but the solid sky, the heavenly bodies and the ocean were co-existent with the gods and existed before the earth was inhabited. (4) Human virtue consists mainly in paying respect to the gods, nobles, and elderly persons, and in defending one's hereditary rights (honor, justice, friendship, modesty, parental and filial love, patience in suffering, and observance of all religious ceremonies).<sup>1</sup> Herein lies the notion of ancient religion which helps to preserve the various elements of grief and bereavement in the Tongan culture.

'Otua (Gods). The indigenous polytheistic gods<sup>2</sup> were engaged in the daily activities of our ancestors. The gods were believed

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<sup>1</sup> Paul W. Dale, The Tongan Book (London: Minerva Press, 1983; reprint, London: Minerva Press, 1996), 108.

<sup>2</sup> The small (g) in god refers to the pre-Christian gods.

to be involved in navigation, farming, healing and the daily life of the people in general. Tongan understanding of the gods perhaps carried similar assumptions to what process theology and other parentheistic theologies today claim. Particular emphasis was given to the idea that god is incarnate in the world, incarnate in everything. This belief yields two basic assumptions: reality reveals God (everything is holy and can reveal meaning) and everything is interconnected in a web of meaning. The second assumption of interconnection is embodied in the Tongan gods, the connection among human beings, and between humans and other beings; thus, one can find a connection of meaning among all particular entities.<sup>3</sup>

The Tongan understanding of the gods was quite different from the Christian understandings that were introduced later by the missionaries. The missionaries taught that the relationship between God and the people is one of love and reverence, with worship being a way of developing and reinforcing that relationship. Tongan gods were not thought of as kind, caring and loving; rather, they could be evil, bringing misfortune to people.<sup>4</sup> Dealing with gods was done for the sake of getting favors, seeking healing, getting advice, winning approval for an intended course of action, or turning away misfortune. Often

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<sup>3</sup> A similar idea is expressed in Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1991), 93.

<sup>4</sup> William Mariner, Tonga Islands: William Mariner's Account, comp. John Martin (London: 1817; reprint, Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Vava'u Press, 1981), 30.



sacrifices were offered and ceremonies were presented; the houses of sacred gods were found everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

In these religious beliefs is found the basis for the Tongan understanding of death rituals, along with other ceremonies of sacred events, which functioned as a means of interaction with the gods. In many circumstances, many of the pre-Christian religious practices required visits and offerings at the gravesites of the deceased. This holy place of gods was thought necessary. Sacred houses were built on the gravesites for the purpose of presenting food and other gifts to the god(s).

Priest. Each god house had at least one priest who was trained in religious knowledge and practice. The priest, it is claimed, had great power and status among the society. They were chosen and inspired by a particular god, and they mainly came from the chieftain class.<sup>6</sup> The title was hereditary within the family. William Mariner, a survivor of the 1806 Port au Prince massacre at Ha'apai island, who became the adopted son of the warrior king Finau 'Ulukalala II, described the status of the priest saying:

When a priest is inspired, he is capable of prophesying, or rather, the god within him is said sometimes to prophesize. These prophecies generally come true, for they are mostly made on the probable side of a question.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Noel Rutherford, Friendly Island: A History of Tonga (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 30-31.

<sup>6</sup> Sione Latukefu, Church and State in Tonga (Honolulu: University Press, 1974), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Paul W. Dale, quoted in "Religion and Traditions," The Tongan Book, 16.

There is no doubt that accepting Christianity was made easy because of a similar pattern of expectation from the minister in Christianity. This religious belief helped to maintain the church structure and make the power of Christianity acceptable to the Tongan society. The missionaries held a similar view of the priesthood. All of their converts, chiefs and commoners alike, were expected to respect and obey them as their pastors. Even in the 'Api (family arena), the minister received special treatment and respect from family members. This is especially true in the time of death, when the minister plays a significant role. According to Barbara B. McGrath, for example, death is not frequently discussed in Tonga. In fact, she says that it is "Only shared with someone who is known and trusted, the pastor especially."<sup>8</sup>

The traditional priests realized from the beginning that acceptance of Christianity, with its stronger and more sophisticated order of priesthood, would mean a decline and perhaps demolition of their traditional priesthood status, together with all the power, privilege, and honor its members had enjoyed. Noel Rutherford explains:

It was the chiefs who had most to lose from the encroaching influence of the missionaries. Fear of losing their influencing position lay at the root of their antagonism, and because they traditionally held

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara B. McGrath, Making Meaning of Illness: Dying and Death in the Kingdom of Tonga, Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1993 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1998), 102.

all power in their hands their opposition was formidable.<sup>9</sup>

Although the power of the chiefs was diminished, with the acceptance of Christianity, they are still respected and have some power among the society.

Pulotu (Heaven). Although Tongans believed in life after death, they did not believe in any future state of rewards or punishment. They firmly believed that the gods approve of virtue, and are displeased with vice; they believed that every man/woman has a chance to serve the god(s). The punishments which they considered themselves liable to receive for disrespect to the gods and neglect of religious rites were chiefly conspiracies, wars, diseases, sickness, and premature death. These misfortunes, whenever they happened, were thought to proceed immediately from the gods.<sup>10</sup>

Before the missionaries introduced the concept of the kingdom of heaven, the Tongans believed in *Pulotu* (heaven), a spirit world lying to the far northwest of Tonga where many of their gods dwelt. *Pulotu* was a much larger island than the whole of Tonga put together and was filled with all manner of good things, described by William Mariner as:

well stocked with all kinds of useful and ornamental plants, always in a stage of high perfection, and

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<sup>9</sup> Rutherford, Friendly Island, 117.

<sup>10</sup> Mariner, 150.

always bearing the richest fruits, and the most beautiful flowers. . . .<sup>11</sup>

In this Tongan paradise dwelt a hierarchy of gods. Some were original gods, for they were thought of as eternal; while others were secondary gods, being the spirits of deceased chiefs and masters. The Tongan belief in life after death dominated the Tongan traditional society in which the spirit of the chiefs and nobles would never die. On the other hand, the common people did not possess spirit and therefore, they had no bright future to anticipate; only the chiefs and nobles could look forward to eternal life.

The chief's soul, after its separation from the body, is termed a 'Otua (god or spirit), and is believed to exist in the shape of the body. It has the same propensities as during life, but to be corrected by a more enlightened understanding, by which it readily distinguishes well from evil, truth from falsehood, right from wrong. Having the same attributes as the original gods, but a minor degree, and having its dwelling for ever in the happy regions of Pulo-tu, holding the same rank in regards to other souls as during this life.<sup>12</sup>

Since deceased members of the community were represented as spiritual beings involved in the everyday lives of the living, a strong symbolic connection between past, present and future was established. The contemporary Tongan knowledge of spirit is still much believed, and the symbol function to recall cultural customs and memories of past relationships. Christianity has helped to

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Dale, 313.

transform these beliefs into a cultural icon which expresses an interest and appreciation in the Tongan Way before European contact.

A wide difference exists between the opinions of the natives in the different clusters of the South Sea Islands concerning the future existence of the soul. Because the possibility of a future life was not a possibility for the majority of the Tongan people, the emphasis on the present was far more relevant than the future. The present-minded Tongan society accepted suffering and sacrifice during funeral rituals as part of gaining dignity and honor.

The missionary teachings emphasized a central doctrine of Christianity: that all people are equal in the sight of God, that everyone is a sinner by nature, and that, in order to get into (*Pulotu*) heaven, one has to submit to certain codes of discipline.<sup>13</sup> This ideology was particularly unpopular with the chiefs, since this doctrine tended to undermine their status, privileges and authority. Most of the indigenous customs played some part in upholding the dignity and privileges of the chiefs. Since the missionaries regarded these as contrary to Christianity, the majority of the chiefs clashed with the missionaries over maintaining these traditional customs.

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<sup>13</sup>Latukeyu, Church and State in Tonga, 31.

## Love and Respect

The Tongan emphasis on love and respect in traditional society was of utmost importance. For chiefs and nobles, almost every ceremony is a symbol of love and respect. On the other hand, for the common people it was often experienced as a way to fulfill an obligation to someone higher in rank.<sup>14</sup> The following are brief descriptions of religious ceremonies that the natives considered important or most sacred to perform during the funeral rituals.

The ceremony of *No'okia* (strangling) is no longer practiced. It had been a custom, on the death of the king, to strangle his wives. This particular ceremony expressed love between husband and wife, and also an attitude of respect to the deceased. Robert Williamson notes that even William Mariner said that this particular custom was not discontinued until during his time (February 1805-June 1811). George Veason, a Duff missionary, stated:

The strangling was done on the death of Mumui, the former *Tu'i Ha'atakalaua*, saying that two of his wives were strangled, and later it was done to the 'oldest' of his several wives. Moerenhout [speaking of Tonga] says that on the death of a chief his wives were strangled on his tomb; and Baessler was told that the strangled wives were placed in the graves. Pere, A.C. says that when a king was interred, they were often buried alive, in the same grave, his daughters, and his wife. Possibly these women

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 32.

were sometimes buried alive, and sometimes strangled first.<sup>15</sup>

This ceremony of strangling was commonly performed upon the widows on the day of their great husband's burial so that they might be interred with him. This performance was considered as an act of unconditional love between the husband and wife. On the neighboring islands of Fiji, the principal wife of every chief underwent this ceremony on the death of her husband.<sup>16</sup>

### Obligation

The ceremony of *tutu'u-nima* (cutting off a portion of one's fingers) was described as an act of sacrifice in hope of pleasing the gods to ensure the recovery of a particular person or to ensure the ascendance of the deceased. It was an obligation of the common people to the higher chief or person deserving of special respect as William Mariner describes: "I am told that among an earlier generation of Tongans it was comparatively rare to find anyone who lived a long life with both (all) fingers intact."<sup>17</sup>

William Mariner described this cutting as an act of honor.

I witnessed more than one little child quarrelling for the honor of having it done. The finger is laid flat upon a block of wood. A knife, axe, or

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<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Robert Williamson, Religious and Cosmic Beliefs of Central Polynesia (Cambridge: University Press, 1933), 248.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 247-48.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in E. E. V Collocott, "Notes on Tongan Religion," Journal of the Polynesian Society, 29 (1911): 25.

sharp stone is placed with the edge upon the line of proposed separation; from the nature of the action, the wound seldom bleeds much. The stump is then held in the smoke and steam arising from the combustion of fresh plucked grass stops any flow of blood.<sup>18</sup>

From these accounts, the affection or respect for the deceased could be estimated by the amount of the bodily pain endured by his subjects in rank (chief or lower). The extreme of this kind of respect is expressed by the Tongan proverb *hoko e fau mo e polata* (joining banana stalk with hibiscus fiber),<sup>19</sup> which refers to one of the Tongan Kings who was found with half of his body amputated. Before the burial, one of his subjects volunteered to die and have part of his body removed and attached to the deceased body before the chief was buried.

#### Rituals Expression

It is important in the light of our discussion to give a brief summary of funeral rituals for both the chiefs, who hold a special rank in the society, and commoners.

William Mariner, in 1806, described the activities, which happened when one of the Kings of Tonga died, giving us the picture of a funeral of someone holding a high rank in the society.

The day after his burial, every individual at every island: man, woman, and child had his head closely shaved, and of course wears the *ta'ovala* (old ragged mats, with leaves of

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<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Dale, "Religion and Traditions" The Tongan Book, 355.

<sup>19</sup>*Paloveape Fakatonga* (Tongan Proverb), 45.



the *ifi* round the neck), the cincture of respect over the ordinary clothing. For king (Tu'i Tonga) the time of mourning is four months. The taboo for touching his body or anything that he had on when he died extended to at least ten months and for his nearest relation fifteen months. Every man neglected to shave his beard for at least one month; and during this time oils were allowed over his body at night but not his head. The female mourners must remain at the graveside about two months, night and day, only retiring occasionally to the neighboring temporary house to eat, etc.<sup>20</sup>

Some of these customs are still practiced but not in the extremes of the past.

The following accounts given by E. E. V. Collocott give a vivid account of what took place at the commoner's funerals. When a man died, only certain people were allowed to enter the place where the deceased was lying, or to touch or do anything to the upper part of the body. Certain *matapule* (talking-chiefs) had the hereditary duty and privilege to do so. Tradition makes it clear that this right was given from one family to another. The children and brothers of a dead man may not approach the body, but his grandchildren may. He is of superior social rank to his children, but not to his grandchildren.<sup>21</sup> I have not seen this aspect lately and I am doubtful if many have seen it, but I have heard my grandparents talk about it.

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<sup>20</sup>Mariner, 393.

<sup>21</sup>E. E. V Collocott, "Tales and Poems of Tonga," Journal of the Polynesian Society 46 (1928): 76.

As the body was awaiting burial, unlike the chief's funerals, people were allowed to come with gifts of mats, *tapa*, and flowers; much of these were distributed after the burial. The body was wrapped in a big piece of native cloth (*ngatu*) rubbed over with oil. Around this was wrapped a mat of the kind called *fihu*. Today European clothes are commonly used. During the mourning period a strong sense of respect is still displayed among the immediate family.<sup>22</sup>

The grave was not filled in with ordinary soil, but with sand, which was more practical on outer islands. (Most of the burials in the urban setting now use the modern graves constructed from cement.) As they returned to the family home, the women of social status may have had their hair cut by the crowd. Sometimes the people of inferior social rank were burned and cut at funerals. All this was taken quite good-naturedly as an obligation to the deceased.<sup>23</sup>

Both the rituals of the kings and commoners have some things in common, such as the awakening (all night ceremony of singing and praying). It is quite important to notice that these ceremonies differ in many respects in both kind and degree, according to the rank of the deceased in society. The period of mourning (*taboo*) associated with the chiefs or kings is still much longer and more sacred. Lately the length of *taboo* not only

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<sup>22</sup>Mariner, 215.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*, 229.

varies and continues according to the rank, but also according to the importance of the family concerned. When a chief dies, mourning (taboo) is observed mainly by his *kainga* (subjects) and those who live on his *tofi'a* (hereditary land). When the sovereign dies the whole kingdom mourns.

Every morning for some days after a funeral, a presentation of food and kava are traditionally offered to the bereaved family. These offerings are called *pongipogi*. Mourning officially ends with a ceremony of beating bark clothing to signify the lifting of the restrictions by making *tapa* and making noise. The family and close relations sit by the beautifully decorated grave for at least ten days. By this time, the *tapu* (scruples) between brothers and sisters will be lifted, and the sister may tend the grave of her brother. Relations and villagers wear a big ragged mat for mourning for five days, but the family members of the deceased wear them for nearly one year. For these ten days, entertainment or beating bark cloth is not allowed throughout the whole village.<sup>24</sup>

The main differences between the strata of Tongan classism are illustrated by this diagram:

	<u>Observed by</u>	<u>Period of mourning</u>	<u>Tongan names for death</u>
Monarchy -	The whole island	Four-six months	<i>Hala</i>
Chiefs -	Only by his	One month	<i>Pekia</i>

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<sup>24</sup> This element of taboo is still practiced, but not to the extent it was in the past.

Commoners -	subjects By the extended family	mourning is observed Three-ten days of mourning	Mate
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### Unwritten Norms

Ancient Tongan society had no particular laws, but was guided by customs of burial based on their religious beliefs, their understanding of love and respect, and their obligation to one another. In practical application, considerable modification was apparently made in these ceremonial burial customs, and eligibility to perform certain functions was not always clearly defined, especially in the case of people of humble social rank.

This uncertainty has probably contributed to the confusion, contradiction, and frustration of our society today. The culture has a certain expectation of funeral rituals, yet leaves it open for interpretation. The flexibility has given the church the opportunity to respond to the crisis in a much broader and more general way. During the funeral and grieving period, certain behaviors and activities are observed. There is clearly no single rule, rather a pattern of lifestyle adopted by the culture. Most of these activities are considered rules or norms to be practiced although they are not written as law.

## Christianity

This section will discuss the introduction of Christianity into the Tongan society.

### Christian Missionary Responses to Death

Pacific Islanders, including the Tongan people, conceptualize and solemnize death far more than any other cultural event in an individual's existence. In the ancient period, the common belief among the Islanders was that the origin of dying was due to some human action, or as a result of something happening to their souls. Nowadays, there are a number of possible explanations given for the reason of death, which contradict the early beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

Tongan beliefs and rituals of death were not new aspects of existence introduced by missionary endeavor; rather, they were already part of their culture. The tools were already there; it was a matter of how to use them. The missionaries were quite successful in transferring these elements from objects in the indigenous religion, to some elements in the new *Lotu* (Christianity). With the help of the new religion, new meaning was given to the death process.

### Changing Pattern of the Mourning Period

Below are descriptions of some of the new interpretations introduced by Christianity.

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<sup>25</sup> Latukefu, Church and State in Tonga, 34.

1. In the past, the eminence of the deceased was considered first. In the present, people of higher ranks may attend funerals of respected commoners. This impact was great and continues to be of importance even today. The following proverb highlights the significance that can be attributed to the deceased after death.

*'Oku 'Eiki 'a e tangata he'ene mate.*

*A rite of passage man becomes a chief when he dies.*

New Tongan Proverb

An individual's funeral is considered probably the most important. Here we can see how the individual was related to others, his/her dignity, rank, and by whom he/she was beloved. Even a slave, or the most humble person serving a family, is mourned by persons of higher rank. There are fine mats brought on behalf of the deceased and other items to be distributed among the mourners. The deceased becomes the chief on this day if on no other.

2. Funerals have traditionally demonstrated the social unity of Tongan Society where people expressed their love and respect to the deceased, sympathy for the bereaved, and also a manifestation of their regard for others. Nowadays, more and more funerals are a time for the family to mend quarrels and broken relationships. At this time distant members come to join in mourning even from different parts of the world.

Certainly, how individuals think about dying and the behavior they define as normal is situated within a cultural and

social context. Nonetheless it is my contention that responses to one's own impending death, are less structured and more individual with fewer people participating than before. While there are patterns and cultural influences to be observed, love and respect are primary.

3. Kinship and obligations assure that no one in the country ever goes hungry or without shelter. Exchanging and sharing gifts support the funeral structure. This involves everything from making gifts for the deceased to feeding the mourners. The current system however is based upon an economic system. Therefore, the relationship of the family is changing depending on the family's financial status rather than the number of family members.

4. Both in the United States and in Tonga, the funeral is an expression of grief on a variety of levels. The process of grieving begins before death if anticipated and lasts for various periods of taboo. There are two kinds of grieving: "real" (e.g., weeping) and "simulated" (patterned singsong keening) *tangi laulau*. Every Island had its own conventional, role-associated, pattern of grieving and one that was not necessarily expressive of depth of feeling. Nor was grief behavior limited to weeping. In the Tonga society it is still expressed possibly by cutting one's hair or wearing ragged garments in contrast to ancient times of cutting off one's finger, knocking out teeth and strangling wives.

### Summary

Despite heavy-handed mass conversions by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century, the Tongan culture has maintained death ritual traditions that pre-date European contact, these have been reformed by Christianity. As for commoners, they have had little to lose but rather much to gain by accepting Christianity. The traditional religion did not have any place for them. With the advent of Christianity, they were told that they had souls after all and that, like the chiefs, they had every right to life after death. Many became very devout and sincere, and some even gave up everything they had for their new beliefs.

This chapter examines how essential the Tongan traditional beliefs are in shaping their funeral rituals. Certain aspects of their customs such as love, respect, and obligation, play a significant role in the mourning ritual. The introduction of Christianity by the missionaries also brought a different understanding and interpretation of grief and mourning into the Tongan context.



## CHAPTER 3

## Current Cultural and Social Changes:

## Their Impact on the Mourning Period

Just like the rest of the world, the Tongan community is confronted with and affected by global economic, social and political relations, and the development of a worldwide communication network facilitated by modern technology. Characterized by great cultural diversity, Tongan society reacts to and incorporates the globalizing tendencies in diverse and culturally specific ways.

This chapter has three primary purposes. First, it will describe the Tongan context of both the Pre-Christian and Christian era. Second, it will introduce the Tongan stratified social structure. Third it will provide a general knowledge of the problems that Tongan churches, both in Tonga and the United States, are now facing, and how they respond to problems. In regard to the problems, the discussion will be limited to the following issues, as raised by interactions between traditional practices and Christian theology: spirit over the body, sacred over secular, and emphasis on the present.

Ancient Tonga

Some Tongan historians believed that the chief system of rank and ceremonial behavior originally was intended to make the *Tu'i Tonga* (king) more respected and more powerful. The *Tu'i*

Tonga was seen by the ancient as the temporal and spiritual ruler of the whole nation. Apart from his divine sanctity, all the land in Tonga from the beginning belonged to the king and all the rights possessed by the chiefs were derived from him.

The nobles and highest chiefs of Tonga are all derived from one or other of the three great chiefly lines whose origins go back to the first *Tu'i Tonga* ('*Aho'eitu*).<sup>1</sup>

The chiefs must acknowledge their indebtedness to the *Tu'i Tonga* for the land and privilege by paying him tribute and by performing the traditional obligation (*inasi*). *Inasi* marked the harvest time of the land when people were offering the first fruits to the gods every year. This seems to me to be a custom or religious ceremony similar to the Jewish ceremony of first fruit.<sup>2</sup>

Tongan society was divided into three classes: chiefs, commoners, and slaves. While the chiefs were held accountable to the King, the commoners were entirely subject to the amusement of the chiefs having no guarantees of protection of either life or property. The distinction in practical matters between the slaves and commoners is unclear. The spectrum of the society at large was reflected in the organization of the various parts of the village. The authority, which a chief had over people, was

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<sup>1</sup> Rutherford, Friendly Island, 38.

<sup>2</sup> The Jewish year was founded on the cornerstones of the Sabbath and three great feasts: Passover, First Fruits, and Tabernacles. First Fruit is a feast of rejoicing in the wheat harvest. On this day, the required offering of the first wheat harvest were taken to the temple in Jerusalem.

replicated in the authority, which a father had over his family. The 'Api (household), was the basic unit of society. This is the basic organism of the extended family, which plays a significant role in preserving the funeral rituals in the society.

It was believed that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Tongan society was well organized and very much stable. Tasman, who visited Tonga in 1643, observed that the country was peaceful and the land was well cultivated. The islanders appeared to have no weapons and so all was "peace and friendship."<sup>3</sup> Momentous changes in Tongan society and politics occurred in the eighteenth century. Tension within the Tongan political system built up to a crisis and contact with Europeans led to a great change in society and culture during the following century.

The internal chaos of the 1800s was aggravated by contact with increasing numbers of Europeans visiting Tonga, including the missionaries. Many ships were laden with prestigious objects desired by warring chiefs and superior iron weapons useful in the struggle for power. European goods, especially those made of iron, were highly prized by the Tongans, particularly the chiefs, who would ultimately obtain anything bought or stolen by the

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<sup>3</sup> Ian C. Campbell, Island Kingdom: Tonga Ancient and Modern (Christchurch, N.Z: Canterbury University Press, 1992), 17.

commoners. Many ships were captured and crews murdered by greedy Tongans.

The appearance of the huge European vessels with their powerful guns, the display of their deadly pistol weapons, arrested the imagination of the Tongans, making their traditional fighting weapons appear clumsy and inefficient. The chiefs were quick to realize the advantages which these superior weapons could give them in their struggle for power .... Consequently, the chiefs were prepared to use every available means to obtain them.<sup>4</sup>

The island was now visited more often by European vessels, including Captain James Cook in 1773 and in 1777. He was so pleased with the Tongan generosity and hospitality that he named them "the Friendly Island." Perhaps the consequence of these visits was the London missionary society being first to have an interest in Tonga in 1800.

### Missionary Era

Various efforts were offered from time to time at the global, local, and regional levels to spread the gospel to all cultures of the world, reaching non-Christian countries in efforts to win every soul to Christ. The modern ecumenical movement arose from the great awakening of the eighteenth century and began a movement of the Holy Spirit with underlying motives of evangelism. One result of this passion was in evidence everywhere, the coming into being of voluntary movements or

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<sup>4</sup> Latukefu, Church and States in Tonga, 19.

organizations in which Christians of different churches and different nations banded themselves together to win the world for Christ.<sup>5</sup>

The missionary enterprises arose from the divine commission to bear witness to the gospel throughout the world and to invite every human being to become Christ's disciple. For this primary reason unity was sought not as an end in itself but as a means to evangelism throughout the world. The London Missionary society is one of many enterprises that proceeded with this endeavor.

#### Mission in Tonga

The London Missionary Society made its first attempt to bring Christianity to Tonga in 1797. Unfortunately it failed in its effort to plant the roots of Christianity in the vulnerable land of the only remaining kingdom in the South Pacific realm. They were ill prepared for their task, and the Tongans were not interested in their new *Lotu faka-kalisitiane* (Christianity), only in their material goods. During the civil war in 1799 and 1800, three of the missionaries were killed and the rest escaped the island.<sup>6</sup>

It was not until 1822 that the Rev. Walter Lawry, a Wesleyan missionary, began the monumental task of establishing Christianity in Tonga. In 1826, after many setbacks encountered

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<sup>5</sup> Konrad Raiser, Ecumenism in Transition, trans. Tony Coates (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 309.

<sup>6</sup> Sione Latukefu, The Tongan Constitution: A Brief History to Celebrate its Centenary (Nuku'alofa, Tonga: Tonga Traditions Comm. Publication, 1975), 16.

by the missionaries, the effort was about to be abandoned. With the arrival of Rev. John Thomas and Rev. John Hutchinson the station in Tonga was saved.<sup>7</sup> The mission was quick to succeed due to many factors, including the consistent effort of the missionaries and their well equipped mission, and the enlistment of the support of the most powerful high chief, *Taufa'ahau*, who later became the first king of Tonga to unify the whole kingdom.

As a result, churches were filled every Sunday with people who had converted to Christianity. Schools were established to help the people read and understand the scriptures. Education was a high priority for the missionaries. Schools followed conversion throughout the island. Education also helped to combat some of the superstitious beliefs of the people and facilitate the understanding of the new concepts they had to introduce. Through Sunday school, love feasts, prayer meetings and classes, new converts were taught the basic doctrines concerning God, human beings and sin as well as to respect the authority of the Bible. The promotion of education culminated in the establishment of the First Tongan School on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1841. Both the chiefs and commoners were receiving the same treatment at school and later became prominent leaders both in the state and church. In this aspect, the missionaries added to the Tongan traditional social structure a new educated elite.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Latukefu, Church and State in Tonga, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 75.

Another significant development in Tonga during the early period of the missionaries was the establishment of the central government for the whole of Tonga. The Methodist missionaries played an important role in this development by formulating the state constitution and by their promotion of central monarchical authority. Many of the heathen chiefs were reluctant to accept Christianity, as introduced by the Methodist mission, due to the possibility of losing their absolute authority over the people. When the great Chief of the northern island named *Taufa'ahau*, who became King George Tupou the first, converted to Christianity in the early 1830s,<sup>9</sup> he continued to grow in power by supporting the Methodist mission. Other chiefs failed to subdue Christianity. With his outstanding leadership during the civil war and the solid backing of the missionaries, King George Tupou became the ruler of all of Tonga.

The old ways of life slowly decreased and new models of belief and practice influenced the system at all levels: state, church, and family. Contact with the missionaries in the 18<sup>th</sup> century left Tonga with many complex ideas and beliefs mixed with established practices. The structure of the rituals around death persisted, but the meanings of these rituals were being shaped by the different beliefs and practices of Christianity.

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<sup>9</sup> Rutherford, Friendly Island, 102.

### Missionary Motives and Methods

The motive and methodology that the early missionaries used to establish Christianity are key factors in understanding the mission of the church in society today.

The missionaries saw their primary role as nurturing the spiritual needs of the people. With constant emphasis on the spiritual role of the church, the church confined its ministry to care for the soul, instead of caring for the whole of human life (spiritual and material). To win every soul for Christ was the motivation that caused them to be careless about the secular needs of the family.

Nevertheless, the works of the missionaries deserve credit for their endless effort at bringing Christianity to the land of Tonga. One of the most important phenomena in the conversion and consolidation of the mission work in Tonga was the religious revival which began in the Northern Island of Vava'u in 1834 and in a relatively short time swept through the whole of Tonga. The six missionaries that were in Tonga at this period were hopelessly inadequate for the demands in Tonga at this stage without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Rev. Peter Turner and Rev. David Cargill called upon the more spiritually minded among their followers to pray earnestly for a revival. The group decided to meet at noon every day to pray for what they called the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."



Sione Latukefu gave more specific detail of the event as

follows:

On Tuesday 23 July 1834 in a service conducted by the Tongan local preacher at the village of 'Utui the revival movement began. People were confessing their sins, weeping and praying for forgiveness consistently: on the next Sunday, at another village, the entire population of five hundred, attending the service was seized by the same influence. From village to village, from island to island, the epidemic spread.<sup>10</sup>

Another tactic of the missionaries was "acclimatization."

It was a method used by the missionaries to modify the primitive culture of the Tongan people to make it like the missionary culture. The missionaries were quite successful in banning some of the indigenous customs, which they believed to be contrary to Christian teaching. One example was the condemnation of dancing because they believed this often led to immorality, especially at night. Certain customs were banned and disregarded although they were valued by the culture.

As a result of these efforts, resistance was expressed from various directions. The primary resistance was from the chiefs and was fueled by the handful of Europeans living on the island the beachcombers, whalers, traders, and ex-convicts from Australia who had been content to live among the Tongans.<sup>11</sup> Opposition also came from the traditional priests and chiefs. The

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<sup>10</sup> Latukefu, Church and State in Tonga, 128.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 26.

new religion was considered a threat, diminishing their authority and their privileges which they had enjoyed for centuries. The new teaching of equality - that everyone, regardless of rank, was equal in the eyes of God - also challenged them.

### Stratified and Social Structure

This section will deal with the main components of the Tongan society, which includes the state, church, and family. The influence of the new religion was not limited to the church setting only, but affected the general life of the Tongan society.

#### State

The social and political stability of the Tongan society is due to the reciprocal relations and balance of interests existing between the various classes of Tongan society. At the top level of the social rim is the king. Immediately below are the chiefs or nobles and then the commoners. At the bottom of the scale were the slaves.<sup>12</sup> The protection and jurisdiction offered by the chiefs ensures the commoner security for both their lives and property. It creates and maintains peace and order. Partly from a deep sense of obligation, besides personal loyalty, gratitude and affection, the commoners are eager to carry out their responsibilities towards their chiefs.

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<sup>12</sup> Campbell, 32.

During the time of unrest when the first missionaries arrived, it is not surprising that dramatic social change was occurring. The chief's relationship with commoners deteriorated. The people were subject to harsh conditions and brutal treatment by their leaders.

Over the past centuries, society re-shaped its institutional structures in order better to fit the requirements of the contemporary world. Social traditions and institutions in Tonga reinforced particular relationships of hierarchy and cooperation between church and State, commoners and chiefs, junior and senior relatives, and males and females. They were relevant to the way Tongan society was structured and reproduced. But, as we have seen, in the latter twentieth century, Tongan tradition became entwined with the process of transnational migration and economic interaction. Tradition has come to buffer the global family against its own internal differences and to become the social cement that binds the community of Tongans who stay overseas together.

The descriptions of kinship ranking given by earlier Europeans such as James Cook and William Mariner apparently applied only to the elite with whom they associated and through which they understood the Tongan society. The social accounts of the commoners are vague in early descriptions apparently because from a chief's perspective they were not socially important.

## Church

A change has also been taking place in attitudes towards religion. The legitimacy of the traditional religion was questioned and important ceremonies were terminated. The sole power of the *Tu'i Tonga* was eventually usurped, and the old political system was replaced with a new system of a collection of independent and mutual chiefdoms. The church sees its purpose as a guide and nurturer of the people's souls. The church hesitated to involve itself in the secular matters of society because it conflicted with its primary role.

The church is the only institution in Tongan society that organizes people society-wide on a regular week to week, if not daily, basis. The church in its activities has incorporated and partially preserved traditional culture, which otherwise may have been lost in the pattern of families working independently of one another. Although not in any way a challenge to the monarch, the churches are uneasy partners with village chiefs and nobles in both power and influence at the local level.

More important, the formation of centralized church organizations became the most formidable challenge to the traditional chief class, which was discussed earlier. In some ways, the church hierarchies have taken over the structure and functions of the old chief hierarchy, especially on the village level. The hierarchical nature of the churches and the absolute power of the minister resembles the structure and prestige

associated with a traditional chief. The concept that the commoner through the celebration of *inasi* gives freely of their resources to the chief or higher authority from a feeling of *ofa* (love) or *fatongia* (obligation), has largely been transferred from a traditional hierarchy to that of the church, except when the king is involved.

Offices in the church hierarchies and in government bureaucracy and administration have provided new arenas for social mobility in contemporary Tonga with increasingly broad-based access and competition among the population.

#### Family

On ritual occasions, such as funerals, the Tongan nuclear family-based 'Api (household) operates as a part of a local established group (*Ha'a*), which has materialized for the performance of functions on such occasions. The relatives bring gifts of *ngatu* (*tapa* cloth), mats of various kinds, and food items. This is an expression of their love and respect for the deceased and sympathy for the bereaved. For the relatives it provides an opportunity for the extended family gathering, where they get to know each other personally and learn their various responsibilities to each other.

#### Changes and Problems/Issues Posed by These Changes

In order for the church to have meaningful and effective involvement in the search for solutions to problems in Tongan

society, church leaders need a critical understanding of those problems. The church cannot justify its social inaction on the basis of ignorance. For this reason, a critical understanding of the hard facts of the Tongan context is essential to formulating a theology which will sensitize the church to its social role in society. These hard facts about the grief process can be understood by reflecting on three primary issues raised at the intersection of changing Christian theology with changing Tongan practices.

### Spirit Over the Body

It is out of the so-called "missionary theology" that the church today still emphasizes the superiority of the spirit over the body. In practice, this ideology means that the life of the soul is far more important than the life of the body. The missionaries are determined to make Christianity the strongest institution and the highest priority in the life of Tongans. Tongan churches always see their role in society to be the guardian of the soul. The church became strictly the only spiritual agency to fill the spiritual needs of the people. Worship is the vivid example of this aspect. The Methodist church in Tonga conducts at least six regular worship services every week besides those services on special occasions. Not limited to the Methodist church, other churches offer the same amount of religious activities. Because the church has continued to restrict its ministry to spiritual needs instead of other secular

needs, a dilemma has been created in the Tongan society. The church's sole concern about spirituality cannot ignore the fundamental needs of human beings nor be justified.

### Sacred Over Secular

Respect of chiefs, women, and older persons is highly valued in Tongan customs, and this is considered a secular practice. In general, respect of certain elements of culture and customs are extremely desirable. The clear instance of this is the church's traditional support of the Government, and especially its uncritical loyalty to the King and chiefs, which has made it almost impossible for the church to speak against any injustices of Government policies. On the other hand, Christian activities are always considered to be sacred. Tongan enforcement of its laws of Sabbatarianism (all work and games are prohibited on Sunday) is a clear example of this aspect.

Richard H. Niebuhr wrote that the attitude of Christians towards culture has been the problem from the beginning: *Christ is set against culture*. In general, the attitude of early Christianity found articulate expression in Tertullian and Tolstoi.<sup>13</sup> Despite the customs of the society in which Christians lived and the human achievements they preserved, Christ was seen opposing them.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Tertullian understood God as One who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, is the creator and the Spirit also, but maintained the absolute power of Jesus Christ. He believed that the conflict of believers is not with nature but with culture. It is in culture where sin chiefly resides.

<sup>14</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 45-76.

In medieval times, the monastic orders and sectarian movements called on believers who lived in what was purported to be a Christian culture to abandon the "world" and to come out from among the worldly and be separate. In the modern period, missionaries who required their converts to abandon wholly the customs and institutions of so-called "heathen societies" are an expression of this attitude:

The missionaries' attitudes reflected their own social and religious background at home where Methodists defined rigidly the things that belonged to the world and things that belonged to God.<sup>15</sup>

The indiscriminate banning of all indigenous practices by the missionaries caused strong opposition from the chiefs and young people in particular. Some joined the Roman Catholic mission where the priests sanctioned and even encouraged some of these customs, such as traditional dance.

The prevailing dualistic view of life in Tonga today has been derived from the Tongan aspect of taboo (sacred or consecrated to a god). This aspect of the culture is amplified by the theology introduced by the missionaries. This theology and its practice means that the life of the soul is more important than the life of the body. Salvation of the soul over the body involved a sense of deep loyalty and respect of the gods. It was

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<sup>15</sup> Rutherford, Friendly Island, 119.



believed that any violation of traditional taboos would bring disaster.

### Present Orientation

Tongan people are very oriented to the present. They are more concerned about the present, how to survive and how to fulfill their daily obligations, than what the future might bring. A new phrase which has now become a part of daily language is indicative of this phenomena *"tuku pe 'a e 'apongipongi ki 'a pongipongi"* (tomorrow takes care of its own). It is a gut-expression of the concept that the Tongan society depends on a web of interdependence. The members of the society rely on each other's resources for survival.

With the success of the missionaries in establishing Christianity in Tonga, the development of the missionary theology in the nineteenth century has more interest in the future of the soul than the present life of the person. The writer is convinced that this is the root of the problem. This is why the church pattern of ministry is so isolated from the life of the social scene of society. The church's hesitation to involve itself in political affairs of the State is a clear illustration of this aspect. Although the missionaries have long gone, the influence of their works is widely exercised by the church today.

Studying these hard facts underlines the failure of the church to minister to the whole person, helps us to gain an understanding of the need for challenging the existing system,

and to revitalize its mission towards society as a whole. The problem has further been aggravated by the church's reluctance in the past to establish a welfare program at the local level, indicating ambivalence to the economic life of the church's members. Recently some churches have come together to join in partnership to do mission work in their communities.

Another problem is the view of structure within the family. The supportive network of the extended family system --making a life in the Pacific way--is not measured by the number of dollars one earns, but rather the number of friends and relatives one has. This pattern of lifestyle can be viewed through *fe'ofa'aki* (each member brings a little something), a way of supporting each other, knowing that one's own turn will come some day. This pattern of support is quite disturbed by the influence of western civilization. More and more people are going overseas and more people are exposed to better education. There is no confidence that due to the influence of change with modernization, the Tongan way based on love, respect and obligation will survive.

#### The Church on the Move

In the search for better solutions for doing ministry with the congregations, many churches have started to move away from their conservative way of doing mission. A few churches, like the Tala-Fungani United Methodist Church of Long Beach, have set up a short loan program to assist church members in times of crises.

Many churches have purchased gravesites for those who cannot afford one. A cluster of churches has been doing joint events to help their local community. More and more churches are working towards providing extensive ministry to the whole community.

In Tonga, many discussions, both at the local and conference level, are affirming the need for a change in the church's theology and structure. It was not until 1989 that the Methodist Conference in Tonga accepted into the order of ordination their first woman clergy person. Despite these changes that are taking place, the church is very reluctant to make other changes, including its theology towards grief.

The emerging attitudes towards customary practices of grief show the effects of rapid social changes that have been shaking the roots of the Tongan social structure and social-religious norms.

## CHAPTER 4

### Theological Aspects of Grief and Loss

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on biblical and theological themes that are particularly related to the project. Within a selected scripture framework, I will express how the topics of loss and grief have been exhibited in both Old and New Testament times. I will also touch on the Old and New Testaments' understandings of celebration. Next, I will present a traditional funeral theology which is the basis of our present system compared to a new funeral theology based on celebration and thanksgiving.

#### Biblical Reflections on Grief and Loss

This section will deal with theological aspects of grief and loss as stated in the Old and New Testament.

#### Grief and Loss in the Old Testament

One might begin with the question of how God understands the pain, loss and grief of human beings? The Old Testament speaks of this matter mostly in the sense of the suffering of humankind and God's relation to those who have rejected God's love.

There are several phrases in the Old Testament related to grief. The equivalent for mourning in Hebrew is *spd* (Isa. 3:26 and Jer.4:28).<sup>1</sup> In a much broader sense it is used in parallelism

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical passages are taken from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

with *bakhah*, which means "to weep" (2 Sam. 19:2) and "to lament" (Mic. 1:8). According to George Buttrick, while there is no distinctive Old Testament expression for "sorrow"; at least fifteen Hebrew root words are translated "sorrow."<sup>2</sup>

Grief has special meaning and various effects in different contexts throughout the Old Testament era. It carried a special role in prophecies of disaster (Isa. 3:26, Amos 5:16), in descriptions of judgment (Jer. 14:2), and in prophecies of salvation when the mourning period would end (Isa. 61:3, 66:10). In Genesis 42-50, Joseph weeps many times in his relations with his brothers and father. Samuel mourned the death of Saul (1 Sam. 15:35), and David mourned the death of his son, Absalom (2 Sam. 19:2). Grief was associated with suffering. In the Old Testament, suffering was interpreted as a means of human and spiritual growth. It challenged suffering persons to decide whether they would accept or reject God and how they would understand God's relation to suffering.

People can understand the nature of God through God's intimate relatedness to us throughout the Old Testament. God suffers because of the people's rejection of God as Lord, and God also suffers with them through their sufferings (Exod. 2:23-25, 3:7-8). God mourns for people (Isa. 15:5, 16:11): "My heart cries out for Moab," "Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer," and

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<sup>2</sup> J.A. Wharton, "Sorrow," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:427.

"My soul mourns like a lyre for Moab and my heart for Kir-hareseth." The following passages also reveal that God mourns with all those who mourn -- Jeremiah 30:5-7 and Isaiah 10:1-4.

To grieve is to mourn or to be distressed. It is characteristic of the Old Testament to attribute human emotions to God. God grieved over the rebelliousness of Israel in the wilderness period. In Psalms 78:40-41, the author talks of Israel's faithlessness and rebellion which provoked the "Holy One" of the Israelites. God is wounded by the broken relationship. Another passage stating a similar concept is found in Isaiah 63:7-10. Here God again grieves over Israel's rebelliousness. We can conclude from these passages that grief has been a significant characteristic of the history of God from the beginning.

The selected passages from the Old Testament affirm the concept of a God who understands our grief and is also involved in our grieving.

#### Grief and Loss in the New Testament

Understanding the original term of grief in Greek helps us to understand the relationship of grief, sorrow, and mourning. All are common attitudes during times of loss. The New Testament has a number of events dealing with the issue of loss. The Greek word, *pentheo* means 'to mourn,' 'to grieve'; *pentho* means 'grief'

or 'sorrow,' as well as 'painful event or fact'; it is commonly used for mourning the dead.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus began to weep in response to the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). Here Jesus grieves over the loss of a human being. He certainly had his own share of hurt, pain, sorrow and grief. The prophet Isaiah foretold that he would be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". One of the earliest experiences of grief for Jesus happened when he received word from Mary and Martha that their brother, Lazarus, was on the verge of death. After two days, he announced the death of his dear friend to his disciples and journeyed to Bethany (John 11:32-33). Jesus in his relationship with Lazarus expresses his understanding of human suffering and hopelessness in the time of loss.

However, on the other side of the story, Jesus reached the tomb and called Lazarus back to life as a symbol that death is not the end of our life, rather a stage of transition for a new beginning. The resurrected Christ brings new life and hope during the time of chaos (John 11:38). Jesus was facing loss, recognizing that God was present with him even in the midst of loss, and recognizing that death is not an end of his relationship with God. Christ also bears our pain and suffering to the end of our material life; yet pain continues in human life. An example of continuing human pain is found in the life of

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 825.

Paul, who underwent a great deal of suffering in his life and ministry. He suffered in many ways (1 Cor. 4:9-13, 2 Cor. 6:3-10).

Jesus experienced grief and loss in many ways, and in a much deeper sense than any human being ever experienced it. His suffering was extreme upon the cross where he died for all of our sins. Both the New Testament and the Old Testament reveal how God shows an intimate relatedness to us. God mourns with those who mourn, suffers with those who suffer, hurts with those who hurt, grieves with those who grieve, and rejoices with those who rejoice.

From the beginning, Jesus ministered to those who mourned and were estranged from each other and God. His good news represented nothing less than "drawing near" or offering "comfort" to all people who were estranged. He tried to reach out to the oppressors as well as the oppressed. "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest, take my yoke" (Matt. 11:28-30).

We respond to grief by bearing our crosses knowing we are not alone. Jesus is grieving with us.

### Biblical Views of Celebration

Almost all the references of celebration in the Old Testament concern occasions of worship. Celebration also took place at the time armies returned from holy wars and the victory



of God was praised (Exod. 15. 20-21, 1 Sam. 18:6-7). The women went out to greet the returning warriors with drums and dances. The warriors might be extolled at a feast, but the main theme was the praising of God (Judg. 11:34).

Celebrations were also affiliated with Jewish festivals. Some psalms were songs of praise sung during festivals. Psalm 149 is an example:

Sing to Yahweh a new song [for his new reign],  
His praise in the congregation of covenanted people!  
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;  
Let the Children of Zion be Joyful in their King  
Let them praise His name with the dance  
Let them sing praise to Him with the timbrel and harp.  
For the Lord takes pleasure in His people;  
He will beatify the humble with salvation  
Let the saints be joyful in glory;  
Let them sing aloud on their beds.  
Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,  
And a two-edged sword in their hand,  
To execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments,  
On the people, to bind their kings with chains.

(King James Version)

Celebrations help us to express thanksgiving. Celebrations are expressions of life in its richest form. Dancing, throughout the Jewish history, is a major element of their celebration to praise God. In Hebrew the term *todah* means thanksgiving, and is applied both to the psalm and the thanksgiving sacrifice. Psalms 9-10, 18, 30, and 32 are often referred to as the Psalms of thanksgiving. They proclaim the glory of God and give thanks to the highest and praise God.

In the rich Jewish traditions of celebration, dancing and rituals were also found on some occasions of mourning and death (Eccles. 3:4, Lam. 5:15, Ps. 30: 11-12). Here the mood of the dancing and mourning is found to be sorrowful and very solemn.

In the New Testament, the celebrative spirit associated with the Lord's Supper is noted in Mark 14: 22-26. Eucharist is a more familiar name for the sacramental meal which, by visible signs, communicates to us God's love in Jesus Christ-- the love by which Jesus loved his own to the end (John 13:1). It symbolizes the gift of salvation through communion with Christ. Receiving the elements, the bread and the wine, or the coconut and coconut juice as is sometimes practiced in Tonga, is the assurance of Christ's forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28) and the pledge of eternal life (John 6:51-58).

The Lord's supper is a ritual derived from the Passover celebration of the Hebrews recalling their escape from bondage in Egypt. It is also derived from the last meal of Christ and his disciples, from which time the Lord's supper became significant in Christian life. Eucharist is a time of remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, a time of communion with God and others.

Eucharist is a proclamation and celebration of the work of God in our midst. It is an act of great thanksgiving and offering given to the Lord for everything accomplished in creation, from life to dust. It is the great sacrifice of praise by which the church speaks on behalf of the whole creation. Eucharist is a

celebration of reconciliation and sharing between all human beings seeking to find good relationships with the cosmos (Matt. 5: 23, 1 Cor. 10:16).

From the perspectives of the Old and New Testaments, celebration is identified with the actions of praise. Celebrations are based on our feelings of thanksgiving and appreciation of the manifestation of Christ within us. Death is not the end of our journey; rather a stage in our lives where we can affirm God's sustainable work within our relationship. Celebration stands as a gift of the divine grace where in Paul's words: "Nothing. . . . in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:31-39).

#### Current Tongan Theology of Death

The Tongan theology of grief is rooted both within our cultural heritage and Christian religious beliefs. Tongan theology is dynamic and changing. Change has come from within the society as well as from outside connections. We discussed in the second chapter the main aspects of traditional culture and religious beliefs and how these beliefs shaped a Tongan theology of death during the grieving and mourning period in the pre-Christian era. The impact of the new religion, Christianity (*Lotu faka-kalisitiane*), as introduced by the missionaries, has greatly influenced the life and beliefs of individuals within Tongan society.

Both grief and mourning rituals, as well as theology, have been reshaped to some extent by the missionary theology. The church has continued to be loyal to the old religious culture, while at the same time adopting the Christian faith. Herein lies the difficult task of the church today.

The theological task of the church is precisely to rediscover the very reason for its existence--the purpose of its mission and the true meaning of the gospel within the Tongan culture. The challenge for the Tongan churches is to engage deeply in practical Christian thinking in the carrying out of its ministry. The church ought to become involved in the daily affairs of its members as a means of understanding its mission and the true meaning of its existence. The church is called to understand the suffering, pain, struggle, grief, and joy of the community in which it exists. The assumption that the church is called to emphasize only the spiritual needs of the community is no longer logical; the church must recognize the significance of secular needs, as well as the struggle people experience through the grief process.

The great task of the church is to continue to reform its mission and to be involved in the humanitarian process; the mission includes community action with people working together; and the church must be responsible and act in a manner faithful to God. The church is called to engage in the world so that the church makes the "living sacrifice" to which Paul calls us. That

is where the crucified life is lived for the salvation of the world. The Church is a community of those who face the conflicts of life and wrestle with them honestly in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The family, more than any other community, is the strongest institution in Tongan society. The Church in Tonga is a family church in which the church is sustained and protected by family units and their cultural influence. The theological task compels the church to address the entirety of cultural, economic, and religious problems, and to build a bridge between the culture and Christian teaching.

In the light of this discussion, the present theology of the Tongan church needs reform in two aspects: the theology of the soul over the body, and the theology of loyalty to culture. Discussion of this theology helps us to understand how the church of Tonga fails to address the fundamental needs of the society where human beings are the basis.

Theology is an attempt to reflect upon and understand human religious experience. It is one way of expressing our attitudes and relationships with God and others--how one bears witness to his/her beliefs and yet is loyal to customs within the culture. The existent theology of the Tongan church is neither purely systematic nor purely contextual theology, but rather the overlapping of both, with adaptations to a pre-Christian traditional theology. Systematic theology emphasizes the dogmatic

task, setting forth the Christian faith as found in the scriptures and in church history. Contextual theology, however, is concerned with the hermeneutical task, the interpretation of the Christian faith in a cross-cultural situation. It seeks to be faithful to the text and relevant to the context. These two approaches to theology are not distinct as some assume, and one could say that the Tongan church values a contextual systematic theology.

The missionaries, with their great successes within the Tongan society, used their influence to destroy most aspects of indigenous culture which they believed to be contrary to their understanding of Christian faith. A clear instance of this effort is the condemnation of Tongan dance, which they believed to be immoral. Some of the favorite sports, such as footraces and canoe-races, were also banned because it was considered ethically improper to spend time on these events rather than doing God's work. Although these prohibitions were finally lifted, the church still carries the feeling that these activities are definitely secular. One example of this concept is the much enforced law of Sabbatarianism, where all activities are prohibited on Sundays except religious activities. On Sunday, the government is closed, no public transportation is allowed, stores are closed, and no tourism is allowed on the beach.

### Soul Over Body

The understanding of "soul" in the pre-Christian era was amplified by the missionaries, who introduced the theology of the future over the present. Since the missionaries were more concerned with the saving of the soul, they focused on the future reference of the soul in their Christian teaching, leaving less or no room for the material needs of the person. The main question one can raise then is how can the church deal only with the spiritual needs of the person, or mourners, and ignore the other basic needs of the person. During the grief period, the church must minister to the whole person (spiritual, mental, and physical). It is a custom that during the mourning period the family has an obligation to prepare food for the people who attended the ritual and give *tapa* in return for the church's involvement in the process. Every time the minister of the church joins the family for prayer or fellowship, the family always expresses their appreciation through the token of giving something in return. This particular gratitude of the custom often reduces the material resources of low-income families. Most of their most valuable goods, which could be turned for profit, are given away. It also contributes for a longer period of recovery due to lack of resources. Humanity should be the main concern of our theology, and the community is the context in which it is exercised.

Certain elements of the grief process help to identify the current status of the church and its theology. The church adopted the traditional custom of wearing rags during the funeral as a sign of respect and honor for the deceased, and a symbol of sorrow, tragedy and grief. The missionaries added to that custom the wearing of black (the color related to death) during the mourning period. The church believes the color white symbolizes peace and resurrection, the heavenly image, while black is identified with the image of death and sorrow. This element of the custom was sustained by the church's teaching which encouraged the mourners to prolong their sadness, guilt, despair, and anger towards death. Wearing black permitted the hard feelings and negative attitudes of the mourner to be expressed, and identified with the feeling of loss rather than victory over the death which is represented by the color white. I have not seen any clothing other than white on a deceased person, while the mourners are in black. Even the Tongan community in the United States has a great reluctance to move away from their own traditions to wear any other alternative to these colors during the grieving period. I found myself in a number of situations where I am the only pastor who wears a white robe in officiating at a service of death. The whole issue of coloring reflects the church's teachings, which places emphases on the loss and grieving rather than recovery and hope.



Confining its ministry in the midst of chaos to providing only for the spiritual needs of the mourners is no longer acceptable. The focus of the church in spiritual activities during the mourning period must change in order for the Tongan church to be faithful to its calling. The impact of this dilemma has largely effected the 'Api (household). The burden of fulfilling the responsibilities and obligations are overwhelming, often leaving families in great debt and spiritual depression. The ceremonies go on for days and days. These are often described as great demonstrations of Tongan love and generosity, which is also wasteful. This aspect of the custom left the deceased of the family in debt for years only to put on a display for others. The welfare of the family is put in jeopardy because of this outmoded tradition. People today have jobs and other obligations and simply can not afford to spend days at this level.

#### Loyalty to Culture

Loyalty to certain aspects of the culture seems to be a stumbling block for the work of the Tongan church in general. Although the church exists within the boundary of their culture and is called to minister within the culture, it must remain loyal to the Christian teaching but still respect the culture. Missionaries observed the elements of the culture, and some of the customs were transformed, adapted, and prohibited to the success of the new LOTU (Christianity). The church's loyalty to the culture was enforced by the missionaries' background. They

had been taught to be respectful of other cultures and they taught the Tongans to respect them and their teachings.

The traditional element of taboo is very much embraced by the church teaching of today. The church hesitated to undermine some elements of the customs and perhaps even questioned if Christian teachings against some of the dictates of the culture should be raised.

The missionary theology of soul over body took another form as the church saw certain moralities in the Tongan culture which were considered sacred while other activities were considered secular. Celebration is a clear example of this. The missionaries considered celebration a secular event while the Tongans in the pre-Christian era had many religious celebrations. As an example of this no drums or *lali* were allowed to accompany the worship service after Christianity was accepted by the Tongans. It was not until the late seventies that electric instruments were introduced into the worship service. Some local churches, even today, are very resistant to accepting instruments in church. With this mentality, during the grief and mourning period, no celebration is allowed until the taboo is lifted. The church has done very little to introduce the spirit of celebration as a part of the grief process.

The funeral service and other church activities during the period of mourning usually focus on the loss and give less attention to the celebration of the life and accomplishments of

the deceased. The service should maintain a balance between remembering and hoping, grieving and celebration. Hope, resurrection, and celebration should be proclaimed but not at the expense of denying or ignoring the human condition of real loss. The focus during the mourning period is on the loss rather than the life of the deceased. The church is a community of believers who come together to celebrate the gift of life in times of chaos and to support each other during times of loss.

When the new *lotu* proclaimed that the living God is the sustainer and provider, the total hope for survival was identified with the providential care of the God of Christianity. This theology -- God is with them, for better or for worse -- is strongly presented in these verses from the Tongan hymnal.

Example: (hymn no.421)

1. 'E 'E li atu a Ho fu'u kavenga e [Lift all your burdens to the Lord  
Tuku ke fua he 'Otua ho me'a kotoa pe. . . . The Lord will embrace  
them all]

2. 'E 'oua si'i tala'a, Tene mafai ho'o [Be stilled! the Lord  
Me'a. 'E lava pe 'a e faingata'a almighty will carry your  
Koe puli 'e fu'u e'a. . . . burden, and the unknown  
will be known)<sup>4</sup>

This God-consciousness was perhaps misrepresented by the missionaries. Since God will take care of every need, you do not need to worry and be responsible for material needs. This concept was also supported by the extended family patterns of helping

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<sup>4</sup> *Himi Fakatonga*, 1826 (Tongan Hymnal and Service Book).

each other. I believe that this is a major problem that the Tongan society still needs to address. Challenged by a new consciousness, we shall introduce a new theology of celebration leaving room for personal and family needs.

Western society has very few mourning rituals and perhaps does not experience as deep a sense of loss as other cultures. The traditional ritual burial replaces and eliminates even the evidence of death for later reality; families are scattered, with little or no tie to a religious group. These contribute to why the western culture seems to grieve less than other cultures. In the recent publication, Worship Across Cultures, Kathy Black clearly states how ethnic groups ritualized the funeral rituals in similar ways but with difference in meanings.<sup>5</sup>

#### New Theology of Celebration

Celebration that is attuned to the emotions and the grieving process is the most effective method to assist mourners to cope with and acknowledge their grief while seeking the assurance of grace in Jesus the Christ. We begin again by stating the definition of celebration. *Celebration is the culmination of religious experiences. Celebration in the time of death is a moment created for people to experience Divine love and transform their attitude of grief to include a focus on Christ's victory*

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<sup>5</sup> Black's work consists of various key elements of worship practices of different cultures, including the service of Word, Sacraments, and Ritual. The Tongan context is one of the many cultures discussed in this book. Worship Across Cultures: A Handbook (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

*over death and his abiding presence with believers during the time of transition.*

This part of the project attempts to develop the concept of "celebration" as a theological ground for the Tongan church to be more holistic and effective in its ministry in light of the changing community. For the purpose of this work, I have chosen to focus on three stages: reaction, realization, and recovery--drawn from the five principles stated by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her classic book On Death and Dying.<sup>o</sup> I will discuss the nature of each grieving stage with the intent of relating the experiences to the concept of celebration.

My desire is to demonstrate that the time of loss can be a very touching, rewarding, and loving time for all concerned. It also can be the catalyst and the touchstone time to strengthen or renew weakened or lost faith. It can turn a grieving time, for many, into a time of joy by letting people experience the wonders of the Holy Spirit, the divine grace.

To be living on this earth inevitably involves pain, but we must seek to make our way through the darkness. How can we turn the process of grief into a celebration of thanksgiving and empowerment? The church should take an intentional role in implementing this effort. The introduction of the spirit of celebration and the establishment of an enrichment program can be

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<sup>o</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying (New York: Macmillan Pub., 1969), 38.

instrumental in giving new meaning to the grief process in the Tongan context.

Grief is a normal life process, a universal emotion, and a basic part of our humanity. Every loss must involve grief. Our losses change our values, beliefs, and attitudes. Grief involves very profound physical, emotional, and mental changes. Every loss, whether seemingly insignificant or vitally important, involves grief. Loss, on the one hand, can be a means of spiritual growth. It is an opportunity to grow into the likeness of Christ. Loss enables us to deepen our trust in God's power of love. God's power can strengthen our faith and produce maturity. Norman Wright, in Recovering from the Losses of Life, says,

Every loss is important. It is part of life and cannot be avoided. Losses are necessary! You grow by losing and then accepting the loss. Change occurs through loss. Growth occurs through loss. Life takes on a deeper and richer meaning because of losses. The better you handle them, the healthier you will be and the more you will grow. No one said the loss was fair, but it is part of life.

Herein lies the strong ties between the church and the community. It is the strong family- and church-oriented Tongans and their strong ties to the community that compel the church to address enthusiastically the cultural, economic, and religious problems in which it finds itself.

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<sup>7</sup> Norman H. Wright, Recovering from the Losses of Life (Tarrytown N.Y.: Fleming H. Revell, 1991), 112.

The grief process consists of a complex set of experiences, which extend through several phases or stages over a period of time. As I mentioned above, Kubler-Ross identifies five stages which one regards as healthy ways of dealing with grief: First, she names denial and isolation; this stage involves an initial reaction of denial. Second is a stage of anger: which involves a feeling of resentment and envy. Third is a stage of bargaining—a sense of desperation. Fourth is a stage of depression; in this stage the person becomes occupied with things in the future rather than in the past. Finally, in the stage of acceptance, the person's struggle is over, and a time for final rest before the long journey of recovery is approached.”

In this project, I will describe three stages that correspond with Kubler-Ross's. First, reaction corresponds to her stage of denial. Second, realization corresponds to her stages two through four-- anger, bargaining, and depression. Third recovery corresponds to her last stage of acceptance. Each of these stages of grief can be facilitated and healed by a time of celebration. Three kinds of celebration correspond with the three stages of grief. These are celebration of loss, of thanksgiving, and of life. In the next sections, we will explore these themes of grief and celebration.

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<sup>8</sup> Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying, 38-137.

### Stage of Reaction and "Celebration" of Loss

The first stage of the grieving process is the reaction stage often referred to as the "protest phase." The phrase "reaction" describes what happens in the mind and body after the loss first occurs. This is a period of shock and dullness. In this stage, we experience a denial of the reality of loss. Kubler-Ross refers to this first stage as "denial and isolation,"<sup>9</sup> because this particular manifestation of grief is so prominent from the outset. At this stage of the grief process the person just goes through the motions that are required of them as they greet visitors, friends, and all whom they come in contact with. The reaction stage of the grief process can last from a few hours to several weeks.

This stage is identified with denial of the loss. In order to help move the mourner through this part of the process, we will celebrate the deep encounter with God's love that comes with the loss of the deceased. *Fakalotofale'ia* is a worship of celebration introduced later in the project to assist the family of the deceased in the process of recovery. The concept of celebration is derived from the very root of Christianity, which helps the people in grief to face loss, to experience God's presence in the midst of loss, and to experience the assurance of divine grace, good news, and God's love. Celebration is the best way to motivate the people of God during the mourning period to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 38.



have hope. It helps the mourners to accept the loss as an element of God's creation and helps them to pass through a period of adjustment following death. Celebration is the response of the people to the grace of God. Death can be a grace, good news for those who have faith and trust in the power of the resurrection (John 3:16).

The word "grace" found in the Greek is *charis*, with the root being *char*. The Greek word for joy is *chara*; rejoicing is *chario*; thanks is *eucharistia*; and gift is *charisma*. All these are rooted in *char*, and all are rooted in *God's grace*. Celebration is part of our natural experience and our relationship with God. It is the heart of our ministry to enable others to feel God's grace and love no matter how much pain and suffering we experience. God has overcome it through Christ.

#### Stage of Realization and "Celebration" of Thanksgiving

The second stage of the grief process may be called "realization." In this stage the grieving person begins to feel the excruciating pain which results from coming into contact with the full brunt of the loss. The emotions most commonly experienced, according to Kubler-Ross, are found in her stages two through four-- guilt, anger, anxiety, and depression.<sup>10</sup> Physical manifestations also appear in many forms. In the Tongan culture, both during the pre-Christian era and the present, some expressions of grief are still exercised. At this stage, viewed

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 85.

as the most critical period in the grief process, the quality and effectiveness of the church program is the single most important and effective factor in determining the speed and the outcome of the mourner towards normal feeling. The mourners will greatly benefit from a '*fakalotofale*'ia' program, one of thanksgiving for the God given life of the deceased, especially during the first five days after burial. The Thanksgiving celebration can be a method and vehicle in which the Holy Spirit brings the assurance of grace to the people.

In the Tongan society the burial usually takes place the day after someone dies. During the mourning period, attention should be given to the accomplishments of the deceased. A celebration worship of thanksgiving gives room for grieving, to acknowledge the loss and offers a great opportunity for healing and empowerment. It offers praise and thanksgiving for an extraordinary life given by God through the deceased.

Kubler-Ross suggested that one must go through each stage to gain full recovery from the loss.<sup>11</sup> The pain must be accepted; thus a celebration of thanksgiving--prayer, fasting, Bible study, and fellowship with others-- can encourage people to face grief and move through the full pain and hope of realization. Feelings need to be analyzed and questioned, identified and dealt with on a regular basis to be effective. Most Tongan families wear black for as long as one year, for they consider it necessary to do so.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 69.

The church also acknowledges this attitude of the mourners by giving time and space for the persons to deal with their painful feelings. The thanksgiving mode will help people by giving them an opportunity for grieving and sorrow yet encouraging them to move away from the custom of wearing black. It is an attempt to move away from anger to patience, from anxiety to security, and from depression to joy.

The age of the deceased and nature of death (tragic, suicide, old age) makes a difference in the content or length of the process. It is not so much the cause of death, but the age of the person that is considered very important in the grief process from a Tongan perspective. Although the pattern of grieving is similar, variations would depend on the cause of death and the rank of the deceased in both family and society.

Certain tasks must be dealt with during this second stage of grief. Struggling through the sadness is one aspect. Crying is an expression of sadness. Guilt, fear and anger are among the most common emotions characterizing the realization stage. The anger may be directed to God, particularly the concept of God as viewed as loving, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Often in Tongan society, anger can be directed at the one who has died, even though it is intellectually and rationally understood that the person could not help dying.

Celebrating God's love through realizing the loss, pain and suffering would allow the mourners to move towards accepting the final stage of recovery.

#### Stage of Recovery and "Celebration" of Life

The final stage is referred to as "recovery," and can be seen as a stage of "celebration of life," which Kubler-Ross identifies as a time of acceptance of loss.<sup>12</sup> The signs of recovery have been implied in the descriptions of the two previous stages: recovering persons gradually rejoin society, accept responsibilities and eventually begin to minister to others and find ways to live creatively. At this stage we realize that it is not possible to expect someone to return to normal life again. Once deep loss is experienced, it will never be forgotten. The scars will always remain and there will be times when the wound will be reopened. But it is possible to recover and gain back our confidence in God's love through the community of faith. This is a time to realize that life will continue and to focus on the future. As one moves into "recovery," it is as if we gradually rediscover reality in the truth that God's "light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."<sup>13</sup> Every member of the community and the family arena should work together to assist in the recovery process.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>13</sup> John 1:5.

The positive content of belief is very much needed for the final stage of the grief process experienced as a new life style of the bereaved which begins to take shape in the concept of *hope and divine love*. This divine love is manifested in the conditions of existence in Jesus as the Christ. This love is the power that can help the bereaved reconstruct their lives, gain confidence and trust to live through grief, absorb the pain, and begin to participate in the new reality of their lives.

The Christian affirmation of resurrection speaks to grief as a means of hope. When the loss comes by death, the resurrection to new life in Jesus Christ may provide comfort to one in grief and assurance regarding the promise of resurrection for the deceased. As the grief process progresses to the phases of resolution and transformation, the resurrection may become a sign of new life possibilities for the bereaved.

Hope is what makes us open to new possibilities. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament offer the high hope for those who trust in the Lord. So long as there is life there is hope (Eccles. 9:4). It is having the strength to want something, to begin to shape the future with a desire. Hope means that without knowing the outcome, we are inviting any good possibility. Our lives are grounded in hope implying a future because our reference point is God. Therefore, to hope is to trust. It is a sense of confidence in what God will do. The Psalmist writes, "My hope is in thee" (Ps. 39:7). God is our hope (Jer. 17:7). God

does help in times of our distress, finally putting an end to all distress (Isa. 25:6-9). Wharton says, "Hope, then, grasps the provisional nature of every earthly presence and is increasingly hopeful in the eschatological future."<sup>14</sup>

A new sense of identity, a new stability, and a new meaning focused on the present and future can begin within the process of grief and mourning. Grief can become a self-healing process in which the church is supportive of the bereaved through praise and festivity. Celebration is the key element of doing theology in the time of chaos. Celebration helps one to resume living again, which is often manifested in new preferences, new habits, new hobbies, and new relationships with others and God.

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<sup>14</sup> Wharton, "Sorrow," 427.

## CHAPTER 5

## New Norms and Practices for Common Folk:

## A Challenge to the Present System

Introduction

This chapter reveals the results from questionnaires distributed to clergy and lay people, as well as the information provided from conversations at the Kava circle, which I have found to be essential to the project. Questionnaires were given to Tongan clergy working for the Methodist church in Tonga and Tongan clergy working with Tongan churches in the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist church. The village of *Mu'a* in Tonga and the Long Beach Tongan Methodist Church are the primary places where lay people were given questionnaires.

The aim of the questionnaire was to learn the effect of the church's current approach towards grief in Tongan society and, secondly, to comprehend the participants' attitudes towards the church's current theology concerning grief and loss in Tongan society.

The last part of the chapter responds to the problem by proposing a *fakalotofale'ia* program, based on the new theology developed in this project. It is an attempt to revitalize the present practices around funerals in the Methodist Church of Tonga and to be a model for Tongan ministries in the United States.

## The Research

### Geographic Settings and Backgrounds

The Village of Mu'a. *Mu'a* is the ancient capital of Tonga where the king (Tu'i Tonga) resided prior to the relocation to the present capital, *Nuku'alofa*, in the late nineteenth century. When the Wesleyan Missionaries started work in Tonga in 1822, Walter Lawry was the first to reside in *Mu'a* under the protection of *Fatu*, the great chief of the village. *Mu'a* is well known for its links between the nobles and the king of Tonga. The King of Tonga, Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, found his ancestors rooted in the village of *Mu'a*. The King's father, *Tungi*, was the hereditary noble who had traditional and legal authority over the land: all the residents were his subjects.

There are six different denominations found in the village. Forty percent of the population is Methodist. Three Methodist churches are located there: one in the south, one in the middle of the town and a main church located on the north side of the village. There are two primary schools. Most of the children attend the government primary school. The Mormons operate their own primary School for their dedicated members. There is only one high school for the entire village which is operated by the Methodists. The village of *Mu'a* is where the government headquarters are. Also located in *Mu'a* are the clinic, police station, and the court of law for all the western side of the island.



According to the town officer, there are about six hundred families in the village, with a total population of approximately four thousand.

Regardless of the migration of its residents, the census shows a constantly increasing population. Most of the residents are youth and children. According to the senior minister of the Methodist church, the church's members on the northern side are made up of a high percentage of youth and children.

The Tongan Community in Long Beach, California. The Tongan community in the Long Beach area was the primary setting for the survey in the United States. There are four Tongan Ministries in the Long Beach area, one Mormon ward, two Methodist ministries, and one Free Tongan church. The Mormon ward outnumbered the other churches, except for the two combined Methodist ministries.

The questionnaires were limited to the lay members of Mu'a and Tala-Fungani United Methodist Church, Long Beach; however the kava circle involved members of other denominations. Most members of the churches are first generation Tongan, mostly ranging from twenty-five to seventy years of age, with increasing numbers of 1.5 and second generation people. Both the Methodist ministries in Long Beach conduct their business in the Tongan language except for Youth and Children activities which are bilingual. Oftentimes the members of the two congregations come together to have joint events. While church members are scattered throughout

the neighboring cities, the majority of the members remain in the city of Long Beach.

Financial resources are varied. Few in the Tongan population have a stable working environment, and most of them are self-employed. The average income is \$35,000 per household. Most of the people believe that with good management this income is enough to fulfill the obligations of the family.

Education is extremely important to most of the families. It is one of the main reasons the Pacific Islanders continue to immigrate to the United States. On the other hand, some families take advantage of economic opportunities and give less priority to education.

Tongans are considered a very religious people. Their involvement in church activities reflects their commitment and dedication to the life of the church's ministry. Most Tongan churches in Tonga have six worship services throughout the week and an activity almost every day of the week. This is much more than churches in the United States.

### The Results of the Questionnaire

#### Data: Lay People

Thirty-two questionnaires were distributed among the participants in both locations, and thirty of them were returned. Twenty were returned from the lay people in Tonga and ten from the Tongan community here in the United States. The participants

ranged from 30 to 79 years of age. The gender cross section was considered important—55 percent are men and 45 percent are women. Ten percent are single and 90 percent are either married or divorced.

All the participants in Tonga are not only faithful Methodists but their heritage is rooted in Methodism. A few of them are married to a person of another denomination.

In the United States, the story is different; about 40 percent of the participants joined the Methodist Church after they came to the United States. Some were formerly members of the Free Church of Tonga, the Church of England, and others. Due to the fact that Methodism was the first denomination to establish Tongan churches and fellowships in most parts of the States, people joined for lack of access to their native churches. Many of the denominations mentioned did establish churches later, but many of their former members have remained Methodists.

The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to find out about the effectiveness of the current approach of the church towards grief in the Tongan society. I also sought to find out how the Tongan churches both in Tonga and the United States could assist in formulating a theology of celebration through thanksgiving during the period of grief in the Tongan community.

## 1. Personal Reflection On Death

### A. What is your understanding of death?

Seventy percent of the participants believe that death is only a transition: a new beginning. Twenty percent believe it is the final stage of growth, and 10 percent believe death is the end of the circle of life--a final process for all human beings.

### B. How comfortable are you talking about death, whether your own or someone else's death?

Ninety-eight percent responded that, although death is an unpopular topic to discuss or painful to think of, it is still worthwhile to discuss. Two percent believe that, because the agony of death can be so serious, it is not good to talk about it. Talking about it would cause more anger, sadness and depression.

### C. How long should someone grieve the loss of a loved one?

The responses were proportionately divided: 20 percent believe we should grieve for a period of no more than a week; 20 percent believe we should prolong our grieving for one month; 20 percent would rather have six months; and 20 percent prefer at least one year.

### D. How should one cope with the hard feelings often associated with grief? (anger, anxiety, hopelessness, etc.)

Ninety-five percent of the participants responded that all the hard feelings accompanying the loss can only be coped with through spiritual support -- by Prayer, Fasting, and Bible study. The other 5 percent believe that additional means of support can be very helpful, such as seeking counsel, a support group, or going away for a period of time.

## 2. Church Responses To Death:

A. What are the programs that the church is now providing for families during the mourning period?

A vast difference exists in the responses between the Tongan community in the States and in Tonga. One hundred percent of those surveyed from the Tongan setting reflected that the only church program provided for the death and mourning period is the regular spiritual support offered through preaching, prayer, and music.

In the United States, 80 percent of those surveyed agreed that almost every church has some type of welfare program, along with the support of a spiritual program offered by the local church to the grieving family. These welfare programs include monetary support, family support, and food supplies during and after the loss; they are conducted as a church mission effort. A cemetery plot is also available for those who are not able to afford one.

B. Is the church program sufficient to meet the needs of the grieving family?

Responses were found to be supportive of the current program of the church. Ninety percent of those in the Tongan setting believe that the church is providing enough spiritual support, while ten percent want to see more of this type. Sixty percent of the participants expressed their frustration with how the church provides poorly for physical support, offering little welfare programs to help families during the mourning period. Sixty percent believe that the church needs to provide support programs before and after death and should try to meet the material needs of the family during the mourning period.

In the United States, the responses showed a different pattern from those of people in Tonga. Eighty-five percent of the Tongan-Americans believe that the church provides enough support towards the bereaved through spiritual and welfare programs during the loss. Fifteen percent believe that the church should provide more assistance to the grieving family.

C. What more can the church provide to help families in mourning?

Ninety percent of the total responses including both Tonga and the United States, urged the church to minister to persons as whole beings. The church must not confine its

ministry to the bereaved through spiritual actions only, but rather offer support for other aspects of their life.

Another aspect of this topic was raised by the respondents who believe that the church must reach out and minister to the dying. The writer believes that this is relevant for the work of the church. It is quite sad to know that the church thinks it is only the minister's responsibility to work with the dying person rather than the responsibility of the church as a whole. The church tends to reach out only to the bereaved after a death has occurred.

### 3. Church and Culture

What elements of the Christian ritual ought to be preserved, transformed or removed?

Sixty percent of the responses from Tonga expressed the need for modification, especially in the elements of the mourning ritual. It was strongly recommended that the period of taboo and the restriction of activities be reduced. Fifty percent are not only in favor of removing some elements of the ritual, like fulfilling the obligation to the chiefs and throwing a big feast, *pongipongi*, but they also support having a program to help the family of the deceased. Since the Tongan community in the States found that the issue of taboo has almost no place in the society at all, the actual ritual is either reduced in length with less meaning or not practiced at all. Two

elements of the grief that both communities would like to cease are the cutting of ones hair and having a big feast after the burial.

People in both communities see the need for the involvement of lay people at the funeral service. This method of lay involvement will be introduced to give space for the family to participate in the celebration of loss. The celebration of the deceased person's life is important to affirm throughout the grieving period. Support groups should also be initiated to work with the family of the deceased during the grieving period and afterwards.

#### 4. Summary of The Results

The following is a summary of survey results from the lay people in Tonga and the Tongan-American community (see Appendix A).

- A. The results of the survey reflect how the majority of the Tongans believe that death is not the end of our journey but rather a transition stage in our lives. As one lay person puts it death is the "gateway" to heaven. Here lies a strong theology regarding the future of the soul.
- B. Both Tongan communities feel that churches are not providing sufficient programs to support members in times of transition; this view is especially strong in Tonga. Although the church responds to grief with a number of spiritual activities,



still, there is room for improvement, especially towards meeting the material needs of the bereaved.

C. Responses regarding grief rituals are mixed, especially in regards to the issue of taboo. The data shows a great demand to change from "old" to "new" ways of dealing with death. The burden of obligation and expectation upon the family is presently so great that it is difficult for the Tongan way of interdependence to provide an adequate response.

### The Results of the Questionnaire

#### Data: Clergy

Fifteen of twenty questionnaires were returned from clergy in Tonga, and all the eleven clergy in the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church returned their questionnaires (see appendix B). All twenty-six questionnaires have the same questions with variations for their difference in geographical setting. In Tonga, the questionnaires were distributed among ordained ministers of the Methodist church, including retired ministers of the Conference. The California-Pacific ministers were in Hawaii and Los Angeles, and all who participated in the survey are now working with Tongan ministries.

Most of the pastors of the California-Pacific Conference are local pastors who are serving on a part-time basis. Almost all of them are either currently enrolled or have been enrolled

in the course of study program at the Claremont School of Theology. Only four of the Pastors hold some type of academic degree or are currently pursuing a degree program.

### 1. Personal Reflections

#### A. What is your understanding of death?

Almost 95 percent of the clergy stated that death is a transition from our earthly life to eternal life. Death becomes less of an end to our life than a stage in the process. Death is a new beginning for those who believe in the power of resurrection and in Christ as our hope for new life.

#### B. How long should someone grieve over the loss of a loved one?

Sixty percent of those surveyed stated that the period of grieving could vary according to the individual and the circumstances, but the longer we delay the effort to gain recovery, the harder it is for people to cope with their feelings. Seventy percent stated that the church is the only institution to provide spiritual guidance for the bereaved indicating a society heavily dependent on the church for spiritual discipline.

#### C. As a minister, what is your most significant role during the grief process?

All the respondents agreed that the primary role of the minister is to provide spiritual guidance to the grieving family

during the period of loss. Both the ministers from Tonga and the United States claimed that the theology of the church in relation to the welfare of the soul is its priority.

D. Does the church provide special programs for families during their grief period?

Ninety percent of the churches in Tonga have no special program other than the informal gathering of church members with a grieving family for prayer and consultation. One church has a special program including the provision of monetary support to the bereaved families.

Seventy percent of the churches in the United States have special programs (both short-and long-term) to assist to the bereaved families. Two churches carry out a welfare program and scholarship drive to help families who suffer loss. They also provide support groups to assist families after the burial.

E. What does the church provide for the grieving family, and is it sufficient to help them recover from the loss?

Eighty percent of the ministers in Tonga said no to the question, but 20 percent believe that churches have done enough for bereaved families. Half of the 80 percent claimed that the spiritual program is sufficient to provide comfort to the family, but that the need for a supportive network is great.

Quite the opposite, 80 percent of the churches in the United States answered "yes" to the question. They feel that

churches are moving in the right direction by providing both spiritual and material support during the mourning period and after the burial.

F. What more can the church provide to help families with loss and to help mourners with the chaos?

One hundred percent of the ministers from Tonga believe that the church can do more in their spiritual program and in addressing the needs of bereaved families in the following areas (even though 20 percent in answering "e" said enough was being done).

1. Monetary support: A gratuity is needed to help families reestablish and reclaim their lives following the loss of a beloved one.
2. Scholarship fund: The church should establish a scholarship fund on behalf of the deceased to assist in the children's education, which in most cases cannot be afforded. There is clear evidence that the churches in Tonga are now open to new possibilities and a different type of ministry within their communities.
3. Support ministries: Establishment of a supportive ministry among church members would give opportunity for lay people to participate in the healing process.

Ninety percent of the ministers in the States believe they are on target by ministering to the hurts and broken hearts and looking for opportunities to serve the community effectively.

G. What elements and customs of the Christian ritual ought to be preserved, transformed, and removed?

Fifty percent of the ministers from Tonga expressed the need for modification, especially in the elements of the mourning ritual where activities are restricted. Forty percent favor removing some elements of the ritual, such as the obligation of the grieving family to throw a big feast, *pongipongi*, for the chiefs and those who attend the funeral. The church must facilitate a program, such as *fakalotofale'ia* to empower the family of the deceased to cope with the loss and go forward fulfilling their responsibilities.

There is also a great demand for revising the liturgy, especially the current liturgy, which has been around for over a hundred years. There is a need for involvement of lay people in the funeral service. At the present time, the involvement of lay people in Tonga is almost nil. Both Tongan communities see the need for recruiting lay people in the process and at the funeral service. Time for family participation in the celebration of the life of the deceased is necessary.

The Tongan community in the United States has found that the issue of taboo has almost no place in American society, therefore, they claimed the question did not apply to them. Most of the actual rituals are either reduced in length with less meaning or not practiced at all. Although some of the grief

rituals are still practiced in the States, the restrictions of American society have compacted the space and time allowed.

### Summary

The overall evidence of the survey of both the clergy and lay, suggests that the church in Tonga would be better off by introducing a new brand of theology and action to help interpret the gospel to grieving families. The following summaries highlight the findings:

1. Ninety percent of the churches in Tonga have no special program for grieving families other than informal spiritual support.
2. Eighty percent of people surveyed agree that the existing program of the Methodist church in Tonga is either insufficient or does not address the basic needs of its society.
3. About 100 percent of the Tongan ministers responded that they believe the church is being challenged to provide a type of ministry which can also address the material needs of members. This approach can be done through (1) establishing scholarship funds for the children of the deceased and (2) monetary support to the family during the mourning period and after the burial.
4. There is a great desire to modify both the ritual and activities associated with practices surrounding the grieving

process. The reduction of the length of taboo and elimination of some of the restrictions would help speed up recovery from the loss.

5. The funeral liturgy should be revised. The current liturgy has been around for over one hundred years with no alternative.
6. The results of both the Tongan and United States questionnaires show strong convictions that lay people should be involved in the process. Here is the ground for doing partnership ministry.

### The Results of the Kava Circle

#### Setting

The Kava circle is the most viable gathering in Tongan culture and contributes to the preservation of the stability of the society. Here members of the society come together to share their own theories and stories, hopes and frustrations, experiences and ideas. It is an informal gathering that welcomes all adults, chief and commoners, who drink from one cup as a sign of sharing and perhaps working for unity. During the pre-Christian era, the kava circle was the decision making body for the society. The chief came together with the men of the village to discuss the matters of the society.

This gathering helps to strengthen the ministry of the church through fellowship, but it also functions as a way to

bring healing and reconciliation among the church members and the rest of its community.

The *Kava* circle has an ongoing problem that needs to be considered by the participants. Some people take advantage of this fellowship by staying long hours, often neglecting their family obligations. Some people drink too much *kava*, which causes side effects on the body.

The *faikava* (*Kava* circle) for this study was held at the second parsonage of Tala-Fungani United Methodist Church of Long Beach, named "Bethel," on October 23, 1998. The Church conducted its weekly Bible study as part of the *kava* circle and was focused on "How can the church minister to a grieving family?" Four questions were asked: (1) What is the true meaning of the church's existence? (2) How does the church carries out its ministry to mourners? (3) Is the church's program for the bereaved sufficient? (4) How might the church in the United States be different in providing ministry to the grieving through a focus on celebration?

There were thirty-one participants in the circle; unfortunately only men were present. Eighty percent of the participants are active members who hold positions in the United Methodist church, including the lay leader. Twenty percent of the participants were either affiliated with other United Methodist churches or other denominations, such as Mormon, Free Church, and



Roman Catholic churches. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 70 years old.

Questions:

1. What is the true meaning of the church's existence, how should the church carry out its ministry to mourners?

Twelve participants were involved in this dialogue through exchanging ideas and sharing their views on the topic. The majority of the participants believe that the church is a community of all believers: sinners, saints, people with broken hearts, faithful and unfaithful, black and white, Tongan and others. It is a community of all believers of which Christ is the head.

The church must not confine its ministry to be solely a spiritual agent, but rather an agent of empowerment to bring healing and comfort, peace and justice, to all creation. The church must make every effort to provide love to every human being through welfare effort, education, and preaching. Two of the participants strongly expressed that the church is only called to serve the spiritual needs of the community. Trying to meet other needs of people (spiritual, mental, and physical) would be unfaithful to its calling.

2. Is the church's program towards the bereaved considered sufficient?

After a lengthy discussion on the question with deep expression and biblical acknowledgement, the summary of the discussion follows:

a. Most of the participants stated that the church's program is sufficient in providing spiritual guidance to grieving families, although there still is a need to modify these programs to meet the immediate needs of the family by considering the length of taboo and activities associated with the event.

b. The group expressed their concern about the need for a long-term program to provide assistance to families after the mourning period. So often the church leaves the bereaved alone to cope with their recovery. At this time, perhaps no Tongan churches have a support group to address the needs of the bereaved.

c. Almost 100 percent of the participants agreed that the Tongan churches are still lacking the organization to serve its community effectively especially in meeting the material needs of the people. Therefore, changes must take root in the theology of the church, giving priority to keeping in balance the material as well as spiritual needs, hurts, pain, and suffering of the whole world.

3. How can the church in the United States be different in providing ministry to the bereaved through a focus on celebration?

Out of the discussion, in which almost everyone participated, a few points were emphasized:

- a) Many traditional Tongan customs reflect two elements-- the spirit of happiness (thanksgiving) and the spirit of giving. These elements seem to shape how Tongans try to live their daily lives. The Tongan people are a smiling people, expressing their feelings of happiness. They celebrate -- dancing, joy, and happiness can be found in almost every Tongan activity. The spirit of giving has proven to be one of the gifts of the Tongan culture. People love to give more than to receive.
- b) In dealing with bereaved families, 90 percent of the participants favored focusing on the positive side of grief. By the church providing a celebrative attitude in a time of chaos, the healing process would be shorter and recovery could happen sooner.
- c) Through a ministry of celebration, the church could proclaim hope for the hopeless, give new life to the despairing, and provide comfort to those who seek comfort in the time of chaos.

### Summary

It became clear from the five hours discussion in the *Kava* circle that the church, both in the United States and in Tonga, is engaging in a struggle to provide an effective ministry in an

unstable society. A ministry of celebration and partnership is quite necessary as the church enters the new millenium. For the church's ministry to be effective in situation of loss and grief, it must seek to communicate, in its life style, the living presence of Jesus the Christ. "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). In times of loss and grief the congregation is called upon to be the physical expression of the presence of God, of divine love, of hope, of faith, and of compassion through one's dark hours of pain.

#### Action Phase

The purpose of this section is to develop and assess an enrichment program (*fakalotofale'ia*) to assist the bereaved in the time of mourning. As evidenced in the earlier discussions, the underlying theological and theoretical assumptions coincide in the hope that this action will result in offering comfort and hope through the enrichment program in order that the grieving person might receive God's healing grace.

This section is written in two parts. The first part will address the time before the burial, and the second part is designed to use during the period of taboo after the burial.

The first action phase is the three days before burial, which is longer than is common in the Tongan context, where people have not had the means to wait three days to bury the

deceased. The second phase consists of a five day period of mourning (taboo) before the taboo is lifted.

Recovery practices vary across rank, age, and denomination. There are so many variations that it is beyond the scope of this project to deal with each one. However, I would like to suggest a general guideline of celebration to be used in the Tongan context. These services are for the immediate family of the deceased, where in the Tongan context everyone in the village is part of the family.

#### The Grief Process (*Fakaloto Fale'ia* Program)

This phase is consistent with both the first and second stages of recovery, celebration of the loss and thanksgiving. The second phase is consistent with the stage of celebration of life. Underlying presumptions and methodology are as follows:

1. God's grace, comfort, peace, and love are available to all who are mourning, sorrowful, or depressed, and for those who are asking, seeking, and knocking.
2. Celebration and reflection are important to the mourners to acknowledge and accept their grief, and to help them stay focused on recovery.
3. Each day's schedule includes:
  - A. Greeting
  - B. Introduction of the theme by the leader
  - C. Singing-Select two hymns from the list

D. Bible readings- from the selected Scripture texts

- Select one or two texts from the Bible
- Each of the texts relates to the theme

E. Celebration & Reflections

- Testimony is a powerful catalyst for celebration
- Involvement of the immediate family is essential

F. Prayer-the prayer should focus around the theme of the day.

G. Closing song

- Either a hymn or special music

H. Benediction

PHASE ONE -- Celebration of Loss and Thanksgiving

(Before the Burial)

Day One - Theme - 'LIFE AND DEATH'

*There is a time to weep,  
And a time to laugh;  
And a time to mourn,  
And a time to dance.*

(Eccles. 3:4)

Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing - (Tongan Hymnal):

(No. 583 [*'Oua 'e ngu*] "Peace be still")

(No. 380 [*Mole hono fu'u masani*] "Life is so short")

(No. 546 [*Li pe ha maea*] "Throw out the life-line!")

Bible readings -

(Rev. 21:2-4,)

Christ is the way, life, and truth.

(Ps. 89:48, John 11:11-50, Phil. 3:10-11)

Do I believe that Christ is the resurrection and life?

(Luke 7:11-17, Matt. 10:1-8)

What can I learn about the healing power of the Lord?

(Luke 8:40-56, Acts 9:1-19)

Do I believe God will reach out to me in this time?

(Isa. 26:19, Ps. 104:29, Rev. 20:4-6)

Are there times in my life when I feel that God turns away from me?

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

Day Two - Theme - SUFFERING AND DELIVERANCE

Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing - (Tongan Hymnal):

(No.520 [Pe te ta 'i ai?]"Shall you? Shall I?")

(No.485 [Tauhi lelei]"Good shepherd")

(No.575 ['E taki atu au]"Lead me oh Lord")

Bible readings:

[Job 3:24-26, Ps. 30:1-2]

The healing power of the Lord is our only hope to deliver us from the obvious.

[Gal. 4:4-7, Rom. 8:14-19]

What do I hope for? What do I want God to do for me today?

[Exod. 9:13; 14:13-, Luke 16:19-21]

As God delivered Israel from the Egyptians, do you believe God can deliver you from your grief?

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

Day Three - Theme - HARDSHIP AND COMFORT

*And I heard a voice from heaven saying,*

*Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the  
Lord henceforth." Blessed indeed," says the Spirit.  
That they may rest from their labors,  
For their deeds follow them.*

(Rev. 14:13)

Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing- (Tongan Hymnal):

(No.603 [Tuku hoku lotu] "Resignation")

(No.403 ['E 'ikai teu masiva au]"I shall not want")

(No.501 [Hanga ki he langi]"Focus on the Lord")

(No.646 ['E ha kotoa 'amui]"Some time we will understand")

Bible Readings:

[Matt. 5:4, Ps. 119]

Do I believe God is powerful enough to deal with my pain?

[Ps. 90:13-17, Isa. 51:1-16]

Do I believe that there is a day of 'release' soon to come?

[John 14:14-31]

What peace has Jesus left with me?

[Ps. 30, 23]

Do I believe God will ever turn my mourning into happiness?

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

## PHASE TWO -- Celebration of Life.

MOURNING PERIOD -- (After the burial)

Day One - Theme - COMFORT

*When we see the beauty in the sky  
And flowers and hear the melody of the birds,  
Hearing the crying of the mourner, and  
The smiling faces of others,  
We know you are in all beautiful things.*

(unknown source)



Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing- (Tongan Hymnal):

(No.438 [Afe mai a!]"Eventide")

(No.569 [Ko e maama mo'onია]"True light")

(No.580 [Hula mo Ia]"It's just like Him")

(No.388 [Ko Vaiola]"Shall we gather at the river?")

Bible Readings:

[Matt. 11:28-30]

God's yoke is easy, and God's burden is light.

[Isa. 40:1-2, Ps. 30:11-12]

What specific preparations must I make in my life now to gain  
comfort in the Lord?

[Jer. 31, Is. 55]

How should I respond today to the hope I am given for the future?

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

Day Two - Theme - THANKSGIVING AND HOPE

*Bless the Lord, O my soul;*

*And all that is within me,*

*Bless his holy name!*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,*

*And forget not all his benefit.*

(Ps. 103:1-2)

Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing- (Tongan Hymnal):

(No.482 [Fakataimi pe]"Everything has its time")

(No.386 [Malolo]"Rest")

(No.497 [Malanata]"The coming of the Kingdom")

Bible Readings:

[Daniel 7:13-14, Ps. 16:5-6]

How can my faith help me today?

[Isa. 24,25,26, Ps. 118]

How and where is God's steadfast love made manifest to me today?

[Matt. 4:24-25, Matt. 11:25-27, 28-]

Give thanks to the Lord always.

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

Day Three - Theme - POWER

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
Because he has anointed me to bring  
Good news to the poor. He has sent me  
To proclaim release to the captives,  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To let the oppressed go free.*

(Luke 4:18)

Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing- (Tongan Hymnal):

(No.545 ['Oua 'e loto si'I]"Petition")

(No.618 [Si'i tu'utamaki Au]"Distress")

(No.466 [Nofo ki ho malu]"Under your protection")

Bible readings:

[Ps. 67:1-2, Acts 7-8]

Do I carry memories which cause me to feel guilty over the way I  
have acted or about things that have happened in the past?

[Acts 13]

What does it mean to be 'begotten', have I been begotten?

[Rom. 8]

What might there be in my life which can separate me from the  
love of God in Jesus Christ?

[Matt. 12:9-14, Mark 8:22-26, Luke 5:12-16]

Healing power of the Lord.

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

Day Four - Theme - COMMUNION

*In my father's house are many mansions;  
If it were not so, I would have told you.  
I go to prepare a place for you. And if  
I go and prepare a place for you.  
I will come again, and receive you unto myself,  
That where I am, there you may be also.*

(John 14:2-3)

Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing- (Tongan Hymnal):

(No.503 [*Fonua mama'o*]"Happy land")

(No.564 [*'Ai 'eku 'ioke*]"Jesus is calling")

(No.559 [*'E 'ikai pehe 'i he*]"Abide for ever")

(No.484 [*Ko fakaku*]"What must it be to be there?")

Bible Readings:

[1 Pet. 2:9-10, Gen. 3]

Are there times I am privileged to dwell in "communion" with God?

[John 16; 17:15]

Can my joy ever be complete?

[Luke 4:1-21, Exod. 16: 1-4]

How does God respond to the murmuring of Israelites after their deliverance?

[Matt. 8:5-13, Mark 5:25-34]

Where must I travel, what must I do to get in touch with God's healing power?

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

Day Five- Theme - CELEBRATION

*Surely goodness and mercy  
Shall follow, All the days of my life.  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*  
(Ps. 23:6)

Greeting

Introduction to theme

Singing- (Tongan Hymnal):

(No.574 [Ko e takanga hono kau mateaki]"The great multitude")

(No.663 [Sila ki vai]"Great confidence")

(No.608 ['Alifa mo e 'Omeka]"The former and the last")

(No.581 [Ko hai mo koe 'oku ou ma'u 'i langi]"Relief from  
contempt")

(No.382 [Ko hevani]"Heaven")

Bible Readings:

[Matt. 8:18-20, Matt. 13:44-46]

The great value of life is that God is within us.

[Mark 6:45-52, Luke 12:35-46, Ps. 103:1-5]

Blessed are those who have no fear.

[Matt. 18:10-14, Luke 15:11-32]

Who can celebrate God's love? Who is seeking?

Celebration & Reflections

Prayer

Closing song

Benediction

### Practical Suggestions for Follow Up

The follow-up by the pastor with the family of the deceased is a significant dimension of the church's ministry to those who are grieving. It is a profound comfort from the perspective of the family that the church has not forgotten them.

1. Make brief visits to the home after the mourning period; share some good memories of the deceased. Help them move through the chaos.
2. Make brief phone calls once a week, or visit people in their home. You can even give a prayer on the phone if appropriate.
3. Send short notes with a Scripture promise, especially on a special day like anniversaries, etc.
4. Invite the bereaved to be involved in church activities.
5. Be ready to assist people who are bereaved through welfare and material support.
6. Assign a group of lay people to work with the bereaved as a support group.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusions

Throughout the study of this project, it has been shown that the Tongan church's ministry to grieving families during and after their mourning period is insufficient. Both the results of the survey and the data from the Kava circle support the premise that the church understands its primary role as a "guardian of the soul." This outmoded attitude of the church fails to provide extensive ministry to the whole person in a time of chaos or to minister adequately to their spiritual, physical, and mental needs. The present system of the church is rooted in a missionary theology which is found to be more spiritually framed. The church's ministry to the bereaved is also influenced by the cultural rituals of taboo, leading the church to ignore the basic needs of the people and to respond in certain ways according to the mores of the culture.

The intention of this project is to search for a new meaning of death and bereavement in the Tongan context, to search for new values and a sense of significance in the grieving process. These new meanings require searching for a new interpretation of grief in the light of the Gospel and reshaping the church's response to mourning families by helping them to acknowledge their grief in a celebrative mood. The search for meaning includes questioning: how can we value the life of the

deceased? and how do we want our own lives to count in times of loss? The search for meaning is a way to assure ourselves that something is promised, certain, and empowering amidst the chaos that we are experiencing--that assurance is called Divine Grace.

What gets most of us through the tough times, as well as through our everyday and ordinary life, is not some comprehensive complete system of beliefs, but some simple phrase or modest insight that is like a lantern lighting our paths that helps us on our way. Since most Tongans have found God to be their ultimate ground for everyday and ordinary life, the church ought to be the best institution to provide God's reassurance during times of chaos. Celebrating Christ's victory over death is a Christian model for the time of grief. God goes before us and leads us towards the future which God has both promised and prepared for our lives.

It was not pleasant in the desert as the people of Israel wandered through. God does not guarantee us a future of pleasantness. God leads us toward an unknown future. There will be tragic times as well as unpleasant, incidental, celebrative, and hope-filled times along our journey. We will discover a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to be joyful, a time to live and a time to die.

The Methodist church in Tonga must be committed to ministering to the whole life of persons. The need for this

holistic ministry is pressing because of the sheer deprivation of God's people in the world. Meeting the needs for food, shelter, education, and health care are crucial responsibilities of the church.

The Tongan society has undergone tremendous changes both internally and externally and in both structures and practices. Funerals also need to undergo changes. The rituals can provide a time and place for people to feel the loss, grief, anger, sadness, and fear that enable them to acknowledge the death of another and face the reality of their own mortality. Transforming the rituals of death can be most helpful to Tongan people if celebration is also encouraged.

A mood of celebration would be a means to help the bereaved reconstruct their lives, gain confidence and trust, live through grief, absorb the pain, and begin to participate in the new reality of their lives. The main question now is how the Tongan church will provide an effective ministry to the bereaved family.

#### Role of the Tongan Church in Responding to Grief

In order to express love towards a person in grief, the church must demonstrate a caring, supportive, and healing relationship that is evident in both the corporate and private lives of its members. To respond to the challenge, the Methodist church of Tonga could follow the following suggestions as guidelines in approaching those grieving in the Tongan context.



### Listening

Listening is one of the most valuable services one person can render to another. Listening goes beyond hearing; the listener becomes preoccupied with another person's situation, thoughts and feelings. Such listening affirms the relationship by strengthening self-esteem and nurturing supportive connections.

The members of the congregation need to listen to each other, that they, as a body and as individuals, may become dependable, available, and committed to minister to the mourners. Through the church's listening to the grieving of the bereaved, the church becomes aware of their needs and responds.

### Solidarity

An attitude of willingness to become involved in someone's struggles is a vital sign of the church being faithful to its calling. So often we, as the church, have busy schedules and are unwilling to allow ourselves to be interrupted by the needs of others. The agenda of the church needs to become flexible in order to make room for the needs of others. The church's willingness to be available to the grieving family is a positive sign and promotes God's love and divine hope in the time of mourning.

With an attitude of solidarity we become involved in the lives of the grieving even if it is beyond our understanding. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church is called to

understand and become fully involved in the struggles, hurts, pains, and grieving of each member and the rest of society.

### Bearing One Another's Hardships

The church is called to help ease the burden of its members through helping each other. This calling is grounded in the recognition that Christ is the true rest: "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Luke 11:28). The question that ought to be asked by each member is, how can we help ease the burden of others during the time of transition?

### Partnership Ministry

The church always has a unique role and opportunity to minister to the grieving family during the time of mourning. A supportive ministry would maintain a balance between grief and joy, loss and hope, and meeting their spiritual and material needs.

The "Means of Grace," for John Wesley are the ways to experience God's unconditional love and peace.<sup>1</sup> Wesley's means of grace suggest practices for ministry in times of mourning:

Prayer. Prayer, according to John Wesley, is the key to the Christian life. The essence of that life is a living relationship with God, and prayer is the vital means for maintaining that relationship. For Wesley, prayer is certainly the grand means of

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<sup>1</sup> As delineated in John Wesley's sermon "The Means of Grace."

drawing us near to God.<sup>2</sup> Prayer is a human responsibility, to give thanks to the Lord our God and to praise the Creator and bring comfort to the grieving.

Scripture. Another means of grace is searching the scriptures. Searching requires the pursuit of God's revelations, including daily reading of the Bible and relating the scripture to one's life. The Bible provides inspiration, guidance, and empowerment as people face the struggles of daily life.

Fasting. Fasting is also observed as part of the traditional religious culture, but I would not encourage it in this context. Many who are in great grief do not eat or sleep well. Their health is often at stake. Therefore this means of self-denial can be limited and exercised once a week as a way of lessening the emphasis of the flesh and its associated needs, and deepening our relationship with Christ. This could help the acceptance of death as part of life.

Fellowship. Finally, Christian fellowship is to be emphasized as a means of grace in that it constitutes the gathering together of believers for fellowship, worship, encouragement, and service. This aspect is a vital part of the church as it tries to help the bereaved during the mourning period. Through fellowship we can witness for each other, hold up

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<sup>2</sup> Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 132.

each other, cry with each other, and celebrate with each other through Christ.<sup>3</sup>

The church that manifests the four previously mentioned services -- listening, solidarity, bearing others burdens, and partnership -- can become a powerful congregation, giving support to the grieving family. The Tongan church can gain in its perspective of mission and ministry through participation in the healing process and through the living out of these means of grace. Through these means, the family of the deceased can celebrate the victory of the resurrected Christ over death.

#### Personal Reflection

We are living in a world of incredible brokenness-- globally, corporately, and individually. Jesus' ultimate story of redemption could help us overcome such human brokenness. Christ is found to be our redeemer and sustainer in times of chaos and hopelessness. God also provides a continuing vision and hope to live out what that redemption means.

Jesus Christ has identified with humanity by experiencing the ultimate pain, sorrow, and grief throughout his life, death and resurrection. In this act of sacrifice and love, Christ engaged life with its struggles and pain and sorrow and was able to overcome. We all suffer one way or another-- physically, spiritually and emotionally. We are violators and violated. But

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 381.

the good news of Jesus the Christ is that the resurrection has proved God's love and righteousness. God is calling us to respond to, and engage in, Jesus' power of redemption and healing. The church is the essential instrument of God's unconditional love and peace on earth.

I am strongly convinced that in order for the church to contribute to solving the problems of our world today, the church ought to seek out its relationship with God, and then to others and to bring healing to the brokenness within the church membership. Thus, the church would be able to face up to the struggle of the world with confidence and be a witness of Jesus Christ as Redeemer.

The church ought to have prophetic voices in its ministry, whether it surfaces in sermons, prayers, education programs, or supportive social programs. It must proclaim good news to the poor and give hope to all humankind in times of grieving. We, as the church, need to increase our sensitivities and expand our horizons to celebrate the contributions of both life and death.

The church is called to be the body of Christ in the world. Paul reminds us that Christ is the head, and we the vital parts of the body, each with different functions, are all working together as one body under Christ's Lordship (1 Cor. 12:12-13). As the body of Christ, we are called to be God's embodiment in today's world, carrying out God's ministry to bring hope to the bereaved and justice to the oppressed. In order to enable God's

ministry to be faithful to its calling, the church must take many different forms to bring healing to the rest of the creation. It needs to be broad in its vision and specific in its tasks.

The motive underlying this project is a conviction that the church in Tonga must be challenged to take more seriously the impact of loss upon the lives of its members and its community. To meet this challenge, both the Methodist church in Tonga and Tongan churches in the United States are called to recognize and embrace the presence of grief.

## APPENDIX A

## Questionnaire for Lay People - Research on Grief and

## Family life in Tonga

(An English Translation of the Tongan Questionnaire)

1. Age
  - a. less than 40 yr. ....
  - b. more than 40 yr. ....
2. Gender
 

Male or Female
3. Membership
  - a. baptized member
  - b. professing member
  - c. non member
4. How long have you been a church member?  
 -----
5. What is your understanding of death?
  - a. the end, the final process of life.
  - b. a transition; a new beginning.
  - c. a kind of endless sleep; rest and peace
  - d. the final stage of growth.
  - e. (other) .....
6. How comfortable are you talking about death, whether of your own or someone else's?  
 Disagree 1    2    3    4    5    Agrees.
7. How long should someone grieve the loss of a loved one?
  - a. three to ten days
  - b. one month
  - c. six months
  - d. one year
  - e. a life time
8. How have you been able to cope with some of the hard feelings associated with grief? (anger, sadness, depression, etc.)  
 .....  
 .....

9. What are the programs that the church is now providing for the family of the deceased during the loss and mourning period?

.....  
.....

10. What seems to be the most relevant program provided by the local congregation during the period of taboo?

.....

11. Is what the church provides for grieving families considered sufficient to meet their needs in recovering from loss?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. What more can the church provide to help the families and mourners to deal with the chaos?

.....  
.....

13. What elements of the Christian ritual ought to be preserved? (Awakening, exclusive clergy participation, taboo, etc.)

.....

14. What are the elements of the ritual you would like to see transformed or removed from the process?

.....



## APPENDIX B

## Questionnaire for Clergy - Research on grief and

## Family life in Tonga.

(An English Translation of the Tongan Questionnaire)

1. Age
  - a. less than 40 yr. ....
  - b. less than 60 yr. ....
  - c. more than 60 yr. ....
  
2. How long have you been ordained in the Methodist Church?
  - a. 1-10 yr. ....
  - b. 11-20 yr. ....
  - c. 21-30 yr. ....
  - d. more than 30 yr. ....
  
3. The church you are now serving consists of ..... members.
  - A. What is your understanding of death?
    - a. the end, the final process of life.
    - b. a transition; a new beginning.
    - c. a kind of endless sleep; rest and peace
    - d. the final stage of growth.
    - e. (other) .....
  
4. I feel uncomfortable talking about death - my own or someone else's.
 

Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Agrees.
----------	---	---	---	---	---	---------
  
5. How long do you feel someone should grieve over the loss of a loved one?
  - a. three to ten days
  - b. one month
  - c. six months
  - d. one year
  - e. life time
  
6. How have you been able to cope with some of the feelings that often accompany grief? (anger, sadness, depression, etc)
 

.....

.....
  
7. As a minister, what is your most significant role during the grief process?
 

.....

8. Does the church provide special programs for families during their grief periods?

.....

.....

9. What seem to be the most relevant programs provided by the local congregation during the period of taboo?

.....

10. Considering what the church provides for the grieving family, is it sufficient to help them recover from their loss?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. What more can the church provide to help families with loss and mourners with the chaos?

.....

.....

12. What elements and customs of the Christian ritual ought to be preserved? (Awakening, exclusive clergy participation, taboo, etc.)

.....

13. What elements and customs of the Christian rituals would you like to see transformed or removed from the process?

.....

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